WHISPERING TUNNELS

Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

A DEVIL-TALE OF VERDUN

Stephen Bagby

February 1925 25¢

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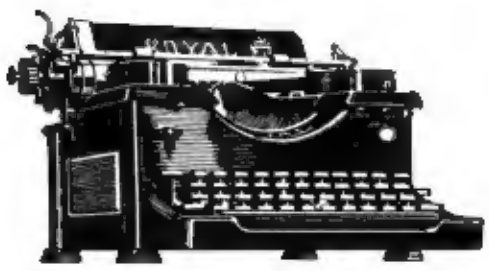

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FOR the second time since his arrival in Paris that day, Miles Cresson, of New Orleans, found that war-time comrades would flee at the mention of a name. There was something so sinister in the way they had stared and made off whenever he uttered it that the American was seized with astonishment. It was not strange, then, that he paid little heed to the carefree students, who crowded past on Boulevard St. Michel that August evening in 1923.

Cresson watched the gray-blue uniform of Captain Émile DeBray until it had vanished in the crowd, determined that he would demand an explanation, should they meet again. For insolence had shone in the officer's small eyes and in his pasty face as his back had turned in answer to a civil question. And that question concerned the fate of a fellow officer—Jules Chaumon. It was mystifying.

DeBray, an Alsatian, was both oily and ingratiating, and it was because of this that Cresson had disliked him from the first. The three (Cresson, DeBray and Chaumon) had been artillery students together at Le Valdahon in 1914. Cresson was one of those valiant, impetuous Americans who took up the cause of France in the beginning. He was the wealthy and adventurous scion of an old Louisiana family, with the twinkling, black eyes of his ancestors; one of those tall, dark, good-looking chaps one often meets in the Southland.

If he had ever held a barrier of reserve between himself and DeBray, Cresson did not know the existence of this, so far as Chaumon was concerned. They had been the closest of friends, drawn together by interests in common. Jules Chaumon reminded one of steel encased in velvet, having the blue eyes and tawny hair of a viking and yet the gentle features and intensity of a prophet. Indeed, he and DeBray were opposites. They differed as much in appearance as in tendencies—of the sort that had caused the stocky Alsatian to fling away his patrimony over gaming tables a few days before their paths had crossed.

Fluency in languages had cemented a bond between Chaumon and Miles Cresson, whose accomplishments in music and art were much the same as those of the young Frenchman. The fortunes of war sent them into different regiments before they had quite completed training—Cresson to

the defense of Paris; Chaumon and DeBray to Fort Vaux, near Verdun.

Letters, at first, were frequent, but as the war wore on those from Chaumon ceased abruptly, and efforts to locate him failed. Cresson, recovering in a Paris hospital from wounds received a few days before the armistice, discovered that Jules Chaumon was missing in records at French army headquarters. Further inquiry at the Invalides disclosed nothing more than the addresses of his nearest relatives—a mother and a sister.

Neither could be found, nor did anyone seem to know just what had become of them. In Paris, the mansion of the Chaumons was shuttered and dark, while at L'Isle Adam the crippled old caretaker of the château had seen none of the family since the war began. Cresson put further inquiry aside and began a long cruise on the Mediterranean to regain his health.

Upon his return to France, Cresson made a tour of the battlefields near Verdun, where he discovered that Chaumon's name affected French army officers in peculiar fashion. They either turned the subject or walked away, when he tried to question them. He gradually became conscious that an invisible wall barred all facts, except that with regard to Chaumon's disappearance in 1917, when the German legions overran Fort Vaux. If the attitude of the garrison's commanders had puzzled the American, that of DeBray, the last man questioned in Paris, aroused hot resentment. For the stocky Alsatian, perhaps, was best able to clear the mystery, and yet had refused.

Cresson pondered over this, as he walked slowly up the boulevard, until, at length, bright squares of light from the terrace of the Café des Trois Ponts crossed the pavement. He stopped suddenly, as a voice from the terrace called his name. He turned to behold a smallish, well-groomed man, wearing a close-cropped mustache, racing after him. The runner was hatless, and his gait endangered his spectacles, which dangled from his waistcoat by a ribbon. A casual observer might have classed him as an American college professor on tour, but to Miles Cresson he was Dr. Arthur Littlejohn, of New York, scientist and "spook hunter."

Dr. Littlejohn, recovering his breath, looked closely at the younger man and frowned.

"If I didn't know better," he exclaimed, "I'd say you were uncommonly blue for a resident of the Latin Quarter. You're worried! I'll see you home and try cheering you up in the bargain. Wait here."

WHEN the scientist emerged from the café with his hat, the two hailed a taxicab and robe in silence to a secluded hotel in Montparnasse, a short distance away, where Cresson maintained his quarters. His apartment, in fact, might be better described as a small museum. The walls of the great living room were covered with rare paintings, armor, tapestries and ancient weapons from the corners of Europe.

Dr. Littlejohn sank into the depths of an easy chair, an unlighted cigar between his teeth, noting silently his host's nervousness in lighting a cigarette. Cresson broke the silence with the story of Chaumon's disappearance, and the unwillingness of French army circles to discuss it.

"There's something about all this that is very mysterious," declared Cresson, resting his gaze on a jade clock high above on the mantel. "There may be no answer to it, doctor, but if there is, I feel that you are the one man able to find it."

The scientist acknowledged the compliment with a quick bow, sinking deeper into the chair, with his elbows braced on the arms, and the tips of

his fingers touching. His eyes alone, peering above the gold rims of his spectacles, betrayed keen interest.

"What I have to tell you," Cresson continued, "occurred in Fort Vaux, which lies between Forts Douaumont and Hardimont, in a circle of strongholds defending Verdun. All told, there are thirty-six fortresses, some of them from four to five miles apart. The whole region is a succession of bare, desolate hills, scarred and pitted like the surface of the moon—a labyrinth, honeycombed with death.

"I can tell you, doctor, no living man knows the extent of that vast, underground network of tunnels and passages, linking up the forts. There are layers of these stone arteries, which run in every direction, all connected with innumerable flights of stairs. The main tunnels branch off into hundreds of smaller ones, which lead to countless great rooms, barrack halls, dungeons and almost bottomless shafts. Trap-doors and inclines descend to the bowels of the earth, and these have doubtless accounted for many of the men that have attempted to explore the tunnels, and have never emerged again. Torches, maps and compasses seem of little use, for the armies of the earth could well be swallowed in the immensity of this maze.

"Three nights ago," the young man went on, "I arrived in the little village of Moncourt, which is about four miles east of Verdun, on the Paris-Metz railway and just outside of Fort Vaux. Rain was pouring and the road from the station to the solitary hotel resembled a river of mud. The inn had been boarded up and patched in spots where enemy shells had left their marks during the war, and I considered myself lucky in getting a room that was fairly dry.

"I donned dry clothing, and after a very excellent dinner I adjourned to the buffet for coffee. There were few persons there, but among these I recognized an old friend, Major Paul Fallaise, commander of my battalion on the Aisne. He appeared greatly surprized, but overjoyed to see me. The major had remained in the army, and for the past two years had been stationed in Fort Vaux.

"The gloomy fortress had a depressing effect, he told me, and this he had attempted to offset by habitually strolling into the village of evenings. Good old Fallaise simply wouldn't hear to my staying at the inn, insisting that I go to Vaux that night as the guest of the garrison.

"It was really a short walk to the fort, although the steep incline of the road made the buttressed entrance seem more distant than it actually was. Fallaise dropped no hint as to the identity of the commander when he suggested an introduction, and I received quite a surprize when I walked into his headquarters. There I saw a short, active man with prominent eyes and a bristling mustache, writing furiously at a desk. He proved to be Colonel Marcel Dupin, "Papa" Dupin, as he had been known at Le Valdahon. "Papa" Dupin leaped from his chair to give me a greeting such as only an ecstatic Frenchman can give. His gestures were many.

"'Zounds, my dear son!' he cried, embracing me. 'So, you have come to visit with us? Superb! In the name of the fort, I welcome you!'

"I laughed and told him that it was, indeed, a happy surprize to find so many of my old comrades in one spot. The evening passed very pleasantly in the garrison clubroom, where the younger officers crowded around after dinner, asking eager questions about Paris, particularly the Folies Bergères, Montmartre and the Bois. All seemed suffering from the monotony of garrison life, and eager to talk on any other subject.

"MAJOR FALLAISE, at bedtime, asked permission to conduct me to my quarters, and together we started along the corridor to a distant wing in the parapets. Above the echo of our footfalls, a far-away soughing as of wind in the thick foliage of trees, intermittent and long-drawn-out, sounded in my ears as we continued. When I asked Fallaise about it, he started, perceptibly.

" 'It is the whisper of the tunnels, my friend!' he told me in a low tone.

"Fallaise, I noticed, seemed trying to pierce the gloom ahead. His eyes were staring, as if momentarily expecting something to appear in the corridor, but the next minute he had recovered himself.

" 'La, it is nothing; only the wind,' the major added with a shrug. 'Some, let us go on!'

"He led the way, but my curiosity rose to such extent by the time we reached the guest chamber that I asked him pointblank about the mysterious whisper. His reluctance to talk of it was plainly apparent.

" 'When we hear the whisper, someone dies!' he explained. 'That is what the troopers of the garrison say. But, mind you, these fellows are a superstitious lot. The sound has been heard only since the war, and it is audible only at night. I, myself, believe it is only the wind playing in some breach in the passages, made when enemy shells destroyed a portion of Vaux. Do not let it trouble you.'

"The major changed the subject, chatted for a few minutes, then bade me good-night.

"The guest chamber proved to be a large, irregular room, built into the grim, dingy stone. It was neatly furnished, however, and very comfortable, with its rugs, and the log fire blazing in the great fireplace. There is considerable chill in the air of the hill country in August, and the warmth of the flames was very pleasant in that atmosphere of damp rock. The room was so large that the rays of the lamp failed to penetrate the black shadows of the opposite corners and walls.

"I took up the lamp and made an inspection of the chamber. In the corner farthest away from the fireplace, dark red curtains covered the doorway of an anteroom, which I dimly discerned was shaped like a pepper box. As I peered through the parted curtains, it seemed that I again heard the long-drawn whisper rise and die out. I listened intently, but it did not come again. I returned to the fireplace, convinced that my imagination had deceived me.

"Somehow, a feeling of depression assailed me, from the moment Major Fallaise stepped from the door. Try as I would, I could not rid myself of a gloomy foreboding, a brooding apprehension that left me cold and tensed. I fell to wondering over the lives of the men whose calling forced them to stay in this gloomy fortress for years, and in my heart I pitied them. I finally arose from my chair, facing the log fire, and locked the door. I next extinguished the light and climbed into bed.

"I must have been asleep for an hour, I think, when I awoke. Shadows were scurrying everywhere in the dim light of the fire, and the whisper of the tunnels, now loud and ominous, seemed hovering in the corridor just outside the door of my room. I tell you, I fell to trembling violently, when I felt a rush of ice-cold air from the corridor, as the locked door swung open on noiseless hinges. Something was coming through that door—something I could not see!

"My heart thumped as if trying to leap from my chest. I tried to cry out, but the sound stuck in my throat. I was powerless to move; my limbs seemed paralyzed. In some manner, I say, I sensed the presence of some malignant person, who had entered the room. I could feel it coming

closer by inches, as I lay there waiting. The glow of the fire dimmed suddenly, and then went out altogether, leaving the chamber in inky blackness.

"A sound like the whirring of many bats seemed everywhere, filling both the corridor and the chamber, where it seemed that a gray, shapeless mass was slowly changing outline and moving in the direction of my bed. I had just enough strength to pull the covers over my head, in a frantic effort to shut out the sight, but no sooner had I done so than something akin to a chilling blast tore back the bedclothes. In terror, I perceived that something aglow with a pale, phosphorescent fire was hovering over me. It took definite outline and then—I saw the face of Jules Chaumon!

"It bore the pallor of death, but his large eyes seemed alight with a gleaming, burning expression of one who had borne the suffering of the damned, as they peered beneath the rim of a trench helmet. His uniform was that of an artillery captain, and his boots trod the floor noiselessly as he passed from my bedside toward the fireplace, and then to the wall a short distance to the right. When his hand touched the stone, a heavy block loosened and fell crashing to the flags. His arm groped the hollow space left in the wall, but he shook his head sadly and moved away, circling the chamber.

"My fears left me, for I was sure that Jules was in some trouble and needed my help. I arose from bed and followed him to the anteroom, but as I stood between the parted curtains, he turned and sank through the stone floor. Panic seized me, for now I was convinced that I had seen an apparition. I leapt across the chamber in an effort to escape, but as I reached the door it closed with a bang. I saw the key turn and heard the lock snap to, by what means I do not know. Again I heard the whisper! A great, black mass was barring my path, a foot away, and gazing at me fixedly, with eyes that were living balls of flame. A horde of soft, flopping things struck against my body and face, and two steely tentacles shot out from the mass and seized me by the throat, choking my head backward. I found myself gazing into the most horrible human face I have ever seen —huge, fat, loathsome, with long fangs in its hideous, yawning mouth, —and its forehead beaded with greasy, fetid perspiration. I struck the thing's face again and again, and in a desperate struggle tore my body free.

"I MUST have fainted, for I awoke, lying on the flags in the center of the room, with Major Fallaise chafing my wrists and neck. He had found the door wide open, when he arrived there to summon me to breakfast. The major was much concerned over my haggard appearance and insisted that I see the garrison physician without delay. I objected,—saying I had suffered merely a slight indisposition, which would soon pass.

"Major Fallaise started violently when I told him that Jules Chaumon had visited my chamber. He made no comment, but wheeled and hurriedly left the room. His attitude was puzzling. One look about the guest chamber convinced me that my experience had been no dream. The stone block rested where it had fallen, on the floor, and the hollow space it had left in the wall, I found, was really a secret vault. It appeared to be empty, but in running my hand over the bottom, I found a photograph of a young woman. I did not examine it closely, but put it into the pocket of my overcoat.

"I dressed, but was too shaken to eat the excellent breakfast, served in the clubroom. I visited Colonel Dupin, anxious to find out the history

of the guest chamber, and had launched into the story of the night before, when I mentioned the name of Chaumon. "Papa" Dupin instantly froze in his attitude, but I knew that my story had made a profound impression. He would not permit me to complete it.

" 'My boy,' he replied, raising his prominent eyes, 'do not speak in riddles, and do not ask irrelevant questions. I am very busy this morning, and must really ask you to excuse me.'

"Thus rebuked, I determined to leave Fort Vaux, then and there; and I did leave, angry and crestfallen. I was engaged in packing up my belongings at the inn, in Moncourt, when a rapping sounded on my door. I opened it to face Major Fallaise. My greeting must have been frigid, for he began an apology at once, pacing the floor nervously. Twice he ran to the door, flinging it open suddenly, as if in fear of eavesdroppers.

" 'You knew,' he asked, 'that Lieutenant Mourey, the pleasant young Breton whom you talked with at dinner last evening, is dead? No? His body was found in bed this morning, and that look of horror on his face—I shall never forget it. Naturally, finding you on the floor this morning unnerved me. The whisper—'

"Then followed a tale of strange happenings in Vaux. The major, his voice sometimes sinking so low that it was almost inaudible, told me of the pledge taken by every member of the garrison not to reveal these tales outside of the fort. Specters so frightful had appeared that neither officers nor men would venture into certain parts of the fort alone. The tunnels were shunned, as if the demons of the universe were centered there.

"Fallaise recalled numbers of the men, who were found dead in the plague spots of the fort, apparently of unseen horrors. Two lieutenants, he said, had recently gone mad on different occasions in the guest chamber, where I had spent the night, under circumstances that were almost identical. In the eyes of both shone the light of insane terror over something they had seen and were attempting to escape, when found crouching and muttering.

"The guest chamber had been occupied by Chaumon and DeBray during the war. Fallaise said he obtained this information from a chart in the records. None of the officers now in the garrison had served with either of the two men, nor, with the exception of the colonel and himself, had known them. He had merely heard of Chaumon's mysterious disappearance in the German attack and of DeBray's transfer to Paris headquarters after the armistice. Of what actually happened in Vaux during the war he knew nothing, so far as regarded Chaumon, except that an order from headquarters forbidding mention of his name was in effect throughout the army.

"Fallaise admitted the order was a strange one and could not recall an instance where a similar taboo had been issued. Yes, he had seen the specter of (he whispered it) Jules Chaumon. The major regarded that as strange, because there was never any record of his death. Others who had spent the night in the guest chamber had seen the apparition, but other things encountered there at the same time had frightened them too badly to observe it in particular. Fallaise told of seeing it once in the tunnels, and another time in the destroyed wing of the fortress.

" 'It was not my intention,' the major said in bidding me good-bye at the station, 'to have you spend the night in the guest chamber, but officials arriving unexpectedly from Paris left me no choice. There was no other room, and I profoundly regret that you suffered such an experience. I shall see you in Paris soon—I hope.' He shook my hand through

a car window, and stood gazing at the train as it pulled out.

"Now, doctor," Cresson concluded, "you know the whole story. I arrived in Paris today, and walked the boulevards for hours before I could make up my mind to come here. The matter is a complete mystery, to my way of thinking, but, of course, you might not face any difficulty in unraveling it. Was it Chaumon in the flesh, or was it a phantom, which I saw in the fortress?"

Littlejohn reflected for several minutes before making a reply.

"There is no doubt in my mind," he said, "that you saw the specter of Jules Chaumon. But in doing so you ran afoul of other phenomena, far more dangerous than apparitions. You spent the night in one of the worst haunted spots in Europe, and it is fortunate that you emerged as safely as you did. The black mass you describe may have been either an elemental, or an intelligence that never existed in human flesh: in plain words, a demon.

"Now, I think I am not far wrong when I say that the specter of Chaumon would have shown you the key to this mystery had it not been interfered with by a host of powerful entities, which must have literally filled your bedchamber. These elemental forces must be exorcised, or the fate of Jules Chaumon will never be known. But such a step must be undertaken by a trained psychic, because anyone else would be overpowered. It is no wonder you fainted."

"Will you undertake this, doctor?" Cresson asked, leaning eagerly forward from his chair. "I feel it my duty to go on with my search for Jules."

"Yes," replied the scientist, "I will do so. First, I must think the matter out and map out a course of action. I cannot say just when I shall be ready."

"I'll wait here in Paris until convenient," said Cresson, thanking Littlejohn. "Ugh! It seems that I can hear the whisper of the tunnels in my dreams—"

"By the way," exclaimed Littlejohn, suddenly, "let me ask what you did with the photograph you found in that guest chamber?"

The younger man emitted a low whistle of surprize.

"By George!" he replied in a startled tone. "I had forgotten about that!"

He stepped quickly to his wardrobe and lifted a tweed overcoat from the rack.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed, drawing forth a mud-stained photograph.

"Let me see it," the scientist requested, quietly.

Cresson passed over the portrait in silence, waiting for Littlejohn to speak. The doctor examined the likeness minutely.

"This is one of the most beautiful women I have seen anywhere," he mused, admiringly. "I wonder what she has to do with the haunted fortress. Hello, here's an inscription!"

Both men, bending over the photograph, saw written in a lower corner: "To My Dearest Jules, from Audrey —Paris, March 16, 1917."

"Three weeks before the fort was taken!" exclaimed Cresson. "I wonder who the original could be? Or what she could have meant to Jules Chaumon?"

He glanced at the doctor, expectantly.

"These are among the things we must find out," Littlejohn answered. "But I think, as you do, there is a connection somewhere. Did you visit the Bureau of Secret Documents, when you made inquiry at the Invalides?"

The scientist peered over his glasses as he asked the question.

"No, doctor," the younger man returned. "I visited only army head-

quarters. I didn't know of the bureau then. I'll go there tomorrow."

THE two Americans crossed the great square of the Invalides the next morning, mounting the broad steps of the War Ministry. Once within the portals of the Bureau of Secret Documents, both sent their cards to the commandant and were presently shown before one of the chief inspectors—a grizzled lieutenant-colonel. The inspector bit his lip and motioned for silence, when they announced the nature of their quest.

"Zounds!" exclaimed the officer, incredulously. "Can it be possible you speak of Captain Jules Chaumon, who was once stationed in Fort Vaux?"

His eyes grew wide, as Cresson nodded affirmatively. He pressed a button on his desk, and when the chief clerk responded, commanded that certain records be brought before him.

"It is forbidden to mention the name of Captain Chaumon in the military service, except, of course, upon official inquiry here," said the inspector, opening one of the massive books of records, when the clerk had closed the door behind him. "Are you not aware, my friends, that Captain Chaumon is posted as a high traitor to France?"

Cresson almost leapt from his chair in astonishment.

"A traitor?" he shouted. "That cannot be! Chaumon was one of the bravest and best of men. He loved France—."

His voice broke off helplessly.

"Nevertheless, *monsieur,*" continued the inspector, placing his thumb on a page, "here is the order. He is charged with delivering Vaux into the enemy's hands on June 7, 1917. It was a close secret, known inside the fort alone, that the French command had prepared for eventualities in blowing open the casemates of Vaux. This was done to establish communication with the outside trenches, of course. But this information, together with orders, maps and plans, was turned over to the enemy by a Frenchman, in the fort. And witnesses say this Frenchman was Jules Chaumon."

"Impossible!" Cresson burst out. "There must have been a mistake."

The southerner turned his eyes to Littlejohn, who shook his head gravely.

"But no, *messieurs,*" insisted the officer. "We are sure that the evidence was correct. We are sure that Captain Chaumon is now hiding in Germany. Where, we do not know. If he had been made a prisoner, would he not have returned to France? For now the last of the war prisoners have been exchanged. If he had died, defending the fort, the enemy would have buried him according to rank.

"Chaumon has never been proclaimed a traitor in orders of the French army, because such a step might prevent his ever being captured. Otherwise, he might think it safe to return. Instead of a proclamation, the French government has taken an unusual course—banished his name in army circles. Of course, *messieurs,* he still holds his rank in the army, and will continue to do so until proven guilty by trial.

"The strangest thing, my friends," the inspector went on, "is the fact that no trace of Captain Chaumon has ever been found. Our bureau men have scoured Europe without avail, and, doubtless, he is carefully concealed."

"Do not forget, *monsieur,*" Cresson interrupted, "that this is but a theory. Why, Chaumon was a tiger for courage! Would such a man place gold above his country?"

"*Sacre!* I do not know," replied the officer, with an eloquent gesture. "One of the main witneses before an investigating committee was a fellow

officer, Captain DeBray, who actually saw Chaumon pass papers to a spy!"

"DeBray!" exclaimed Cresson, incredulously. "Why, *monsieur*, this officer was Chaumon's friend!"

He broke off, recalling the odd behavior of that officer on Boulevard St. Michel the evening before.

"Exactly," returned the inspector: "his friend! That is why the evidence is so overwhelming. DeBray was reluctant enough, to be sure, but country is above friendship, *messieurs*. However, if there is nothing else—."

"There is something else, my colonel," said Littlejohn, "about Captain Chaumon's mother and sister. Could you tell me anything about them?"

The little scientist had spoken for the first time, and his keen gaze was now riveted upon the Frenchman.

"Ah, yes," answered the inspector. "They are living somewhere in Paris, but I do not know the address. The family estate was in the name of Jules Chaumon, as the male heir, and this was confiscated by the government of France, as is, of course, usual in the case of suspected traitors. For the sake of his mother and sister, I, personally, am glad there was no public proclamation. It is really tragic, this eviction of Madame and Mademoiselle Chaumon from their homes. I recall seeing them here, when they appeared before the investigators."

Cresson started, recalling the darkened mansions and the disappearance of the two women.

"Would this portrait describe either of the two ladies?" asked Littlejohn, extending the photograph to the officer.

The Frenchman seized it and turned the likeness to the light.

"*Sacre!*" exclaimed the officer. "It is she! It is the daughter, his sister. Mademoiselle Audrey, I believe. But, *messieurs*, I have told you all that I know. I must now beg you to excuse me, for I have a conference soon."

The inspector shook the hands of both Americans in turn, as they thanked him and departed.

The two men agreed that a search for the two women would be necessary in discussing the new angles of the case. At the Café des Trois Ponts they questioned several of the waiters, Cresson giving them a description of Captain DeBray. All knew him as a frequenter of the place, usually dining there in the early evening, and always alone.

"One thing that I can do," Cresson told Littlejohn, "is to watch Captain DeBray. Evidently this fellow has unlimited money, according to the waiters, and is spending it, too. I'll shadow him, doctor, for it is just possible that wine has loosened his tongue. If he has talked—."

Cresson's eyes conveyed his meaning.

"A most excellent idea," Littlejohn agreed. "In the meantime, I'll map out other work we have to do."

The two separated.

CRESSON, in the café that evening, was careful that DeBray did not discover his presence. His table was screened by a latticework of vines, and it was behind this that the American saw his uniformed quarry swagger in. When DeBray made his exit, the American trailed behind him like a wraith, from the boulevards to the narrower streets of the Latin Quarter. He saw the Alsatian light a cigarette and then enter a gray stone apartment building. Cresson arrived at the entrance just as his quarry stepped into the lift.

The Louisianan darted softly to a stairway behind the shaft, and crouched against the wall, where he could command a view of the hall. Twenty minutes elapsed, when the silence was broken by the whir of the lift machinery. He heard the car descending, and voices—a man's gruff tones and the modulated ones of a

woman. Persons bound for theater, or promenade, Cresson conjectured, for he could not see the occupants. The car grounded with a grating sound; the gates opened. Then a girl, clad in deepest jet, stepped from the car, followed by DeBray. The sight of her features made Cresson gasp.

It was the original of the photograph, only more beautiful, more ethereal, in actual reality. A shadow of sadness shone from the depths of blue-violet eyes. She was slender, yet molded with the grace of a statue. Her voice was musical in its soft, lilting tone. To Cresson, standing there, she seemed a vision of gold and white —a painting stepped from its frame, endowed with life.

Something in her bearing—a certain reserve—convinced Cresson that this fair girl tolerated the Alsatian's air of proprietorship because of some vital reason. Why did she even appear on terms of friendship with the accuser of her brother? What could she mean to him? These were the questions that the American then and there determined would be answered. He waited until they had gone before emerging from his place of observation, and then returned to his quarters, elated. He, at least, had found the Chaumons.

Littlejohn and Cresson decided that no time should be lost in calling upon the family. Accordingly, the next morning the two stopped before the door of a fourth floor apartment in the building. Cresson rang the bell. The door opened, and a tall, stately woman, whose snowy hair resembled a coronet, faced them.

"Madame Chaumon?" asked Cresson, with deference.

"It is Madame Chaumon," she replied. "Do you wish to see me?"

"Yes, *madame,*" Cresson replied, "if it would not be an intrusion. I wish to introduce myself as Miles Cresson, former captain of French artillery. I doubt that you have ever heard of me, but your son and I—."

"Monsieur Cresson," she exclaimed in wonder and emotion, "the same that my dear Jules wrote me of so many, many times? Ah, *monsieur,* it cannot be! And yet, it must be. Will you not enter my poor dwelling? You, dear *messieurs,* are most welcome!"

"This, *madame,*" said the Louisianan, indicating his companion, "is Dr. Arthur Littlejohn, who served France and her Allies with distinction in the hour of need. He knows of Jules."

The scientist bowed gallantly over Madame Chaumon's extended hand, and the three moved inside.

The elderly woman conducted her visitors into a small living room. The two Americans took chairs facing her, when she had become seated.

A slight rustle in the entrance caused them to turn in the direction of the sound. Cresson beheld in the doorway the golden girl of the night before; and Littlejohn beheld the original of the portrait. The two quickly rose as she entered the room and stood beside her mother. There was a surge of admiration within the breasts of both Cresson and Littlejohn, for the contrast of types was, indeed, one of noble loveliness.

"My daughter, Mademoiselle Chaumon," said the elder woman, as she introduced the visitors.

The girl responded gracefully, extending an impulsive hand to each of the men in turn. There was an aristocracy of breeding in her poise and in her features, from the gold of her hair to the delicate uptilt of her chin.

"I feel that I have known you always, Monsieur Cresson," she said. "Dear Jules spoke of you so often. Ah, *monsieur,* you were his best friend."

Her eyes filled with tears, and her hands betrayed her intense struggle to hide the tumult of emotion.

Cresson told the story of his search, careful to make no reference to hap-

penings in Fort Vaux, nor of his visit to the Invalides.

"His letters seemed to break off, suddenly," the Louisianan concluded, "and I never heard from him again. No one seems to know just what happened to Jules, after the Germans captured Fort Vaux."

Madame Chaumon was no longer able to keep back the tears. It was tragic to behold the grief of these two gentlewomen and their struggle for composure. At length, with an effort, Madame Chaumon spoke.

"You know," she said, "that he was accused of delivering information to the enemy, which resulted in the capture of the fortress? Accused of selling *La Belle France*—his country—to the Germans! Accused, I say, vilely and falsely, of being a traitor! Believe me, *messieurs*, when I say that my fine, noble Jules could never be guilty of that. He died fighting for France. I feel it. And oh, if I could but clear his name, I would willingly lay down my life!"

"You have had much to bear," said Cresson, gravely, "and both Dr. Littlejohn and I are anxious to clear the name of Jules Chaumon. Of course, seven years have passed since the enemy captured Fort Vaux, and time may have destroyed the proof we seek. We are determined, however, to leave nothing undone toward clearing up the mystery and restoring your estate."

"Oh, *monsieur*," said Madame Chaumon, earnestly, "the estate matters not. It is the honor of my only son that I wish to clear. I did not dream that my Jules had an enemy in the world, until Captain DeBray, a man who pretended to be his friend, ruthlessly accused him of treachery. Oh, *messieurs*, that man! He cares little for the suffering of a mother and a sister. Their gratitude will go with you in your quest."

THE Americans left the apartment, filled with a deep sympathy for both mother and daughter, planning speed in their search. In the two weeks which followed, they were almost daily visitors, and so eloquent that finally they overcame Madame Chaumon's objection to appearing in quiet portions of the boulevards. The four would steal away to quaint restaurants and theaters off the beaten track.

Dr. Littlejohn left for Moncourt, after winding up pressing scientific reports in Paris. He promised to wire Cresson in case there were developments in his plan, parts of which he declined to reveal. He merely asked the younger man to hold himself in readiness, should he be needed.

"I should like merely to look over the ground in my own way," he told Cresson on departure. "When my investigation carries me inside the fort, I shall call for you. In the meantime, address me at the inn."

A week after the doctor had gone, Cresson sat alone with Audrey Chaumon in the Luxembourg, listening in stunned silence while she told him of her engagement to Captain DeBray.

"It is for mother's sake alone," she said sadly, "that I have promised to wed this man. Won't you believe me, my dear friend, when I tell you that it is I who make this sacrifice?"

She turned appealingly to the southerner, who was plainly perplexed.

"Do you love him, *mademoiselle?*" asked Cresson, earnestly. "I cannot believe that you do. Nor do I understand your reason for marriage with the accuser of your brother. Surely your mother does not wish this! Be frank with me, Audrey."

Cresson was unaware that he had addressed her by her first name. She toyed with her handkerchief in confusion.

"My friend, I despise him," she said, feelingly. "Yet I have made

mother believe that I love him. It is only because she loves me that she would permit it. Mother is unaware of the bargain—DeBray's promise to restore the estate in her name after the ceremony. The wedding is to take place two weeks from today. The banns have been published, and alas, I must go through with it."

Cresson now realized the nobleness of her sacrifice, and the thought of it made him turn his head and stare dejectedly at the ground. When he glanced again in her direction, Audrey was weeping softly, bitterly, her whole body shaken with emotion. The sight aroused in him that tender sympathy that all men have for distressed womankind. He longed to take her into his arms, to comfort her as he would a child, yet he restrained the impulse, knowing the utter futility of it. Both attempted to hide the turmoil in their hearts by affecting a mask of gayety, on the return home, succeeding most miserably.

Cresson reached his study in a state of dejection. He turned the key slowly in the lock, and stopped suddenly. Beneath the door was the yellowed edge of a telegram, delivered in his absence. He stooped to pick it up, and saw that it was from Littlejohn. It read:

"Come. Expect you Moncourt tomorrow."

That was all, but it was enough to busy the southerner with the packing of his bag.

IT WAS well into the following morning when Cresson stepped on to the station platform in Moncourt. He found Littlejohn waiting with a carriage, and together they drove to the inn. The scientist cautioned the younger man that a short nap might be necessary before undertaking the work laid out that evening. Cresson awoke in the late afternoon to find Littlejohn studying a map of the fortress and the known portion of the tunnels.

Littlejohn, laying the map aside, gave details of his plan. He explained that he would begin work that night in the haunted guest chamber of the fort, alone, because he did not wish to expose anyone else to danger. Cresson objected vigorously, declaring that he would take chance for chance with the scientist. Littlejohn glanced at him admiringly.

"That's what I call grit," he said, slowly. "Not one man in a thousand would go back into that room, after an experience such as yours."

It was useless to attempt dissuasion, and Littlejohn turned the subject as they walked to Vaux in the waning light of the afternoon. The rays of the sinking sun bathed a desolate scene of pitted hills and scarred ravines, which were crowned by the fortress of Vaux, lighting the low, rakish ramparts a weird red, enhancing the blackness of their shadows. Fallaise met them a short distance from the entrance, and the three remained in discussion several minutes before going on. The major seemed paler, more anxious and thinner, it seemed to Cresson, than when they had seen each other last. They listened closely as Littlejohn pointed out the necessity of keeping his and Cresson's arrival as nearly secret as possible.

The two dined with Fallaise that evening, apart from others. The major, in a low voice, told them that two men had died and three others were hopelessly insane of terror over unseen things within the past week. These tragedies took place on different nights, he said, but on each, those in the fortress had plainly heard the whisper.

"The whisper of the tunnels, *monsieur,*" said the major, his face ashen.

Fallaise was intensely interested in the experiment, but declared that not all of the world's gold could persuade

him to spend a night in the guest chamber, even with others. It was plain that the major's experience during his two years' assignment to the garrison command had shaken him tragically. He bore up only because of the expected transfer; a removal from Vaux to a place where there were neither tunnels nor whispers.

Littlejohn again endeavored to show Cresson the danger that awaited any one except a trained psychic in coping with unseen forces. The younger man, however, refused to be swayed by this argument.

"Many of these tunnels were built before Napoleon's time," said the scientist, "when black magic raged in portions of Europe. Today, there are persons in France, adept in the art of producing innate intelligences more terrible than the monster created in the story of Frankenstein. These whispering tunnels and mysterious deaths and insanity among men of the fort may be due to some curse placed on its members by a vengeful sorcerer long ago, one who was, in some way, harmed in this place. Such curses may rage for hundreds of years, after the death of him who called them into being, unless dispelled by a powerful exorcist."

Dr. Littlejohn's face grew grave as he concluded.

"Keep this in mind, Miles, my boy," the scientist cautioned, "and abide by it. Don't give way to fear in that chamber tonight. If you feel yourself being overcome, fight it—fight it with all the strength of your will. Do as I tell you, and ask no questions. There is danger enough for both of us, if the forces are of great power. If one gives way, under such circumstances, anything may result—insanity, or even death."

The three stood in the corridor just outside the guest room, listening, as a faint sound vibrated through the hush of the corridors, slowly rising and falling, and then diminishing. It seemed faint and far away, deep below the fortress at times, at others filling the corridors about them with a soft and swishing subtleness.

"The whisper!" breathed Fallaise, his eyes terror-stricken, as he strained his ears with an intentness that stiffened his entire frame. He turned his haunted gaze to his companions only when the sound had ceased altogether.

The major remained with the two Americans but a short time, and reproached himself on departure that he had permitted them to occupy this deserted portion of the fortress even for a night.

DR. LITTLEJOHN locked the door and gazed about the large, irregular chamber, noting silently the long-drawn-out shadows, which seemed to take their rise in the corner and creep across the floor. Nor did he fail to observe the shadow above his head—a hovering mist, midway between the high ceiling and the floor. It was the omen, regarded by psychics as the certain sign of a spectral presence. The scientist drew his electric torch and set himself to "feel after" what was really wrong with the room, while Miles Cresson remained seated before the log fire, which had been kindled earlier in the evening.

As Littlejohn passed slowly around the walls, he gradually gathered impressions: very unpleasant ones. These seemed worst in the anteroom of pepper-box shape, where a sensation of utter loathing and sickness of soul swept over him. He decided that someone in the chamber, though unseen by himself or Cresson, was watching every movement. Littlejohn gazed between the parted curtains for several minutes, then walked to the fireplace to face the southerner.

"Sense anything, unusual, Miles?" he asked, wiping his spectacles.

"Feel awfully peculiar, doctor; can't say why," was the young man's reply.

"Keep a cool head, son," advised Littlejohn. "We're in for a night of it—and no mistake. Don't cross the center of the floor. If you find it necessary to move, walk around close to the walls. For in the center of a place such as this, a malignant entity is always most powerful—at the walls it is weakest."

Except the flickering shadows, the two men saw nothing in the next two hours. It was well past midnight when both heard the whisper, faint at first, but gradually increasing in tone, until it became almost a roar in the corridor outside. They exchanged significant glances and steeled themselves for an ordeal.

Without warning, the locked door swung wide and a rush of icy air filled the chamber. The gasping roar of air currents deafened them; the lamp was blown out, its flame vanishing in a puff.

"Keep your back to the wall!" shouted the scientist, hurling aside his deadened electric torch, and flinging Cresson back against the masonry.

The fire dimmed, as it had done on the previous occasion, and the whirring and flopping of unseen creatures raced about the high ceiling. A long drawn wail, rising to a shriek, pervaded the chamber, and the fire went out altogether, leaving the room in darkness. Something immense seemed filling the room, something violently hostile and terrible. Globes of greenish blue light floated through the air and bowled over on the floor, and the fetid breath of slobbering things blew against the faces and hands of the Americans. The strangling of dying humans seemed to issue from the anteroom, now lit with a pale, ghastly light.

The immense entity was coming nearer. They could feel the approach, inch by inch, of something that threatened to overwhelm them. Suddenly Littlejohn made a mystic sign and pronounced three words in an unknown tongue. He ran rapidly around in a wide circle, scattering a powdered substance about the center of the room, where the malignant intelligence hovered. When he reached the starting point again, he stepped forward, pouring a drop of liquid from an odd-shaped vessel of brass, drawn from his pocket.

The circle sprang into flame, lighting the chamber with a blood-red glow. Littlejohn's eyes glittered straight into something ahead, and his whole being seemed transformed as he drew himself erect and poised. His arm circled his head with the brass vessel, as he leapt to the edge of the flaming hoop, reciting a staccato chant.

"Appear!" the scientist screamed. "Appear! In the name of the Creator, I command you to appear!"

A black cloud seemed to fill the center of the red circle. Suddenly, both men saw it. A great, shapeless creature was taking the form of a man, so tall that the head was bent against the ceiling. Two burning, baleful eyes were fixed on the pair, as a snarling issued from its great black mouth, lined with long, jagged teeth. The creature's body was covered with scales; its powerful arms and toes were armed with long, razorlike claws. Littlejohn steeled his will, to prevent the thing's efforts to overcome him with the noxious stench it emitted. It was the beginning of a deadlock of wills, which lasted for minutes in that room of damp stone.

Cresson saw the doctor, like a sorcerer of old, advance toward the thing, his voice rising and falling, chanting the lines of a Latin incantation. The thing retreated a few feet, only to redouble its efforts to close in on the two men. Littlejohn made the

sign of the cross, stamping his feet as he advanced, bidding the entity begone in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. There was a wail and a sucking noise as it vanished like a flash through the curtains of the anteroom. The door slammed shut and locked; the fire suddenly leapt into blaze again, and the lamp relit with a clear, steady ray. The flaming circle died out.

Cresson had fainted. Littlejohn ran to his side, as he recovered, staggering weakly into a chair. The southerner was deadly pale, and for a few minutes unable to speak. Littlejohn mopped his brow and stood with his back toward the fire.

"It has gone out of the room," he said at length, "but it may return any minute. Be on your guard! It is an entity of great power and has not yet completely taken shape. There is no doubt in my mind about it being an elemental freed by some powerful magician in olden times, and set raging by this bloody battleground in the late war. Undoubtedly black art was practised in this very room. You must fight against being drawn into the tunnels—for the chances are you would never emerge."

The scientist flung himself into a chair, but as he did so, the door opened violently, and again the room was plunged into darkness. Littlejohn placed his back against the wall, but to his dismay, Cresson ran to the center of the chamber, striking and shouting.

"Get away! Get away! I tell you, get away!" he cried.

The young man fought like one possessed, but suddenly his voice changed into a booming, reverberating bass, which filled the atmosphere with echoes. It sounded now in a low deep chuckle. Above him, Littlejohn saw the round spots of flame that were the creature's eyes.

"Hail, Master!" spoke Cresson, in deep Flemish. "Hail, all-powerful Prince of Darkness. Lucifer!"

The tones were not his, the scientist noted, as the rumbling voice trailed off into unintelligible gibberings.

Littlejohn forgot his own safety, and rushed to draw the southerner back. Too late! With a wild shriek, Cresson disappeared at top speed through the door, which slammed shut before Littlejohn could follow. He stood still, as steely claws sought his neck; he drove these back with the force of his thought. There came to the scientist the realization that Cresson had been snatched from the room by a lesser force, while the greater was centering its power on him.

Again he threw out his will, quickly drawing from his vest a golden crucifix, holding it aloft, as he began the ancient rites of exorcism. As he prayed, he could feel the power of the entity growing weaker and weaker, until at last it dispelled itself as the distant bugles heralded the coming of day. He concluded his prayer with the benediction, convinced that the evil intelligence had vanished from the fort forever.

LITTLEJOHN'S first thought was of Cresson, as he passed from the chamber. Instinct guided him along the passageway and down dark flights of steps to the labyrinth below, where the whisper sounded faintly in the tunnels. His echoing steps beat a straight course over the never-ending path of moldy flagstones, until at length a white patch of light glimmered in the distance ahead. It proved to be a breach in the tunnel, overlooking the destroyed portion of the fort.

The scientist recovered his balance with an effort, as he stumbled over the unconscious form of Cresson, lying in the opening. He made a hasty examination of the southerner's body, but found no wounds beyond bruises

and cuts. Wrapped about Cresson's ankles was a slender strand of copper wire, which convinced the scientist that his friend had tripped over this while fleeing back into the tunnel to escape some terrible sight.

The expression of terror on Cresson's face gradually disappeared, as he slowly revived under Littlejohn's ministrations. The scientist supported him, as he emerged from the opening in a weakened and nervous state. They decided to return in the open air, rather than risk the danger of becoming lost in the tunnels, and finally reached the exterior of the fortress by clambering over the shattered masonry of the ruins. Once more in the chamber, now quiet and peaceful, Cresson recounted his experiences, after rushing forth from the room.

"Something seemed pulling me," he said, "and it was a force of such power that I could not struggle against it. I was drawn farther and farther into the tunnels, and into the midst of frenzied things that filled all space. There was a luminous mass ahead of me, which at length became clearly outlined. I saw that it was Jules Chaumon, in the vivid blue-gray uniform and trench helmet of the French line troops. He pointed ahead, uttering no word, and I followed on, powerless to resist the force that seemed in possession of my will, through passages and down steps into the bowels of the fort.

"When we walked out into the ruined part of the fortress, Jules pressed a granite slab, and a large opening in the floor presented itself. We went down still farther into a chamber so large that there seemed no walls or ceiling to it. I followed Jules to the center of the floor, and, doctor, I saw him fade right through it. There came the sound of many soldiers crowding about me, until I could feel their breathing, chill as death, on my cheeks.

"I was thoroughly terror-stricken by this time but it seemed that I could not flee. Moans, screams and hissing whispers rang in my ears. A terrific cannonading seemed in progress outside the vault, and the rush of many waters under the flooring where I stood, unable to stir. I saw terror-stricken soldiers, outlined in a bluish light, race madly about the chamber in a veritable dance of death, and a long-drawn call, 'Run for your lives!' seemed to undermine my reason.

"I tore myself free from long, bony fingers that clutched my throat with a strangling grip. I plunged over the flagstones, fighting to clear my way. I reached the steps and ran upwards, only to be dragged back by the bony hands. They seemed clutching my clothing, my limbs and my hair. Hordes of rats swarmed up the stairs, tripping me as they squealed and fought. I kicked a passage through their scurrying, loathsome bodies, and twice I fell, with the creatures streaming over my body, to rise and struggle on. It seemed that the whole earth shook with a crashing, blinding roar, as I stumbled out of that charnel house. I tripped, fell, and knew no more."

Cresson, from sheer weariness, flung himself upon the bed and was soon in a sound sleep. Littlejohn tiptoed from the chamber, going at once to headquarters, where he sought out Major Fallaise. He drew the officer aside, with the story of the wire over which Cresson had stumbled in the tunnel. Arming themselves with maps and compasses, Littlejohn and Fallaise led a group of six men to the tunnel entrance, after descending into the ruins.

The men were known for courage, but the sound of the whisper, which suddenly sprang from nowhere, unnerved them to such extent that it took considerable persuasion to force them on. The copper strand was located without difficulty, and the party

followed its length back into the fort. They found that the wire ran up a flight of stairs, which ended flush against the ceiling. Fallaise put his shoulder against the vaulted roof and pushed upwards. Suddenly an entire section of rock lifted, and the little group emerged into the anteroom of the guest chamber. It was a trapdoor, the existence of which was unsuspected in the command. The wire, they found, was attached to a blasting battery resting on the top step.

Fallaise departed in haste to inform Colonel Dupin of the discovery. Littlejohn, in the meantime, led the group back into the tunnel and descended dark stairways, listening intently to the sound of the whisper, which gradually became nearer. The descent carried them to a depth which cobwebs attested had not been sounded in years. The whisper had become a roar as they reached the bottom tunnel, leaving the men in a state of terror.

Littlejohn started exploration of the deep tunnel, when the fears of the men had subsided. The sound seemed to issue loudest behind an iron door, leading off the passage. It took the combined efforts of the seven men to budge the door, after the rusted bolt had been removed. When it finally slid open, a blinding cloud of steam overwhelmed the little group in the passage, and a hissing sound that was almost deafening issued from the darkness beyond the door. Littlejohn returned to the entrance, thrusting his electric torch inside. At first he could see nothing, but as the hissing gradually ceased, the vapors lifted sufficiently to reveal the lower portion of a great chamber. He sprang back with an exclamation.

"A geyser!" he shouted to the men. "After all, the whisper of the tunnels has a logical explanation. There is a crater inside, whose bottom is lined with skeletons. There must be hundreds of them whitening down there. Unquestionably, this pit was a place of execution a hundred years ago, where living men were boiled to death by the geyser."

Littlejohn ordered the door closed, and told the soldiers to follow.

In one of the corridors, branching from the tunnel, the scientist discovered dozens of dungeons, containing rusted iron rings, manacles and chains. Rotted clothing on the flagstones gave mute testimony that human beings had been imprisoned here. In three of the larger dungeons there were racks, screws, burning-irons and other implements of torture, but the most important evidence of the dreadful scenes enacted here, Littlejohn found in one of the smaller cells. His torch had swept about the interior, and had fallen upon an inscription in Flemish, scrawled into the stone wall. Translated, it read as follows:

I, Guilbert Savannes, of the Commune of Verdun, in the year 1791, am doomed to torture by Louis, the king, for the practise of sorcery. Sorcery, so be it. I leave this dungeon to join Lucifer, my master, in the realms of darkness. In so doing, I bestow my curse upon the king, his hirelings, and the scene of my torture. My familiar, Grothar, created in blood, nourished in blood, shall be awakened by blood to wreak vengeance upon all who dwell here.

"Savannes!" exclaimed Littlejohn to himself. "One of Europe's most infamous devil-worshipers. Humph, don't wonder that King Louis and his court came to grief, with so powerful a curse cast on them!"

The scientist drew away from the dungeon, satisfied that both the curse and the whisper of the fortress had been explained. The party ascended to the upper tunnels of Vaux, where it disbanded.

LITTLEJOHN found Fallaise and Cresson awaiting him in the guest chamber. They listened breathlessly as he told the story of his discovery.

"It can readily be seen," he explained, "that the geyser below is the

source of the whisper in this fortress. It is, of course, intermittent in its action, more active at night because of cooler atmosphere. There seems to be no connection between the whisper and the curse, although it was natural, of course, to associate them, because both were usually active at the same time. The deaths and insanity of men here, in my opinion, occurred from fright. Blood shed so freely here during the war undoubtedly recalled the sorcerer's curse with redoubled power, and the familiar haunted his victims one by one. You need never again fear the whisper, for I have exorcised the curse."

Within an hour from the time Fallaise had gone from the guest chamber, the Americans were requested to appear before Colonel Dupin. The grizzled commander began chuckling when he saw Cresson, and an amused glint lurked in his eyes. Fallaise, who stood by his side, motioned them to chairs.

"*Messieurs,*" said "Papa" Dupin, "I believe now the story told by Monsieur Cresson of his being haunted in the guest chamber. Major Fallaise has explained it. To say that I am grateful for the exorcising of the curse by Dr. Littlejohn, would not express a small part of the gratitude I feel toward him. I suspected the tragedies here were caused by some curse, but I was powerless to combat it. Peace and contentment will be ours from now on.

"The esteemed doctor and Major Fallaise have rendered another great service. This morning, for instance, they found that a certain copper wire, which Monsieur Cresson will remember as having tripped him up in the tunnel, was connected to a powerful blasting battery beneath a trap-door in the anteroom. This trap-door was cleverly built into the floor, no one in the fort suspecting it was there. But someone knew of it, during the war, and gentlemen, that part of Fort Vaux supposed to have been demolished by enemy shells was actually destroyed by the deliberate blowing up of its powder magazine!"

"You mean, blown up?" gasped Cresson.

"Precisely," replied the colonel. "The guilty person must have been a traitor. He must have acted with lightning swiftness, for the enemy had begun the attack that later captured the fortress. Now, I believe that the underground vaults, beneath the ruins, still exist, covered with debris. In this case, the three of you might uncover the evidence we seek. I will hold a detail of men in readiness to clear the ruins tomorrow. Will you do this much for France?"

The three men agreed, thanking him for his confidence. "Papa" Dupin then turned to Cresson.

"My son," he said, earnestly, "Captain Chaumon was your friend, and you are most anxious to clear his name. I, too, am anxious to do this, but we must have evidence more overwhelmingly reliable than that the government now has against him. Let us hope that we may find it."

He clasped the young man's hand, and together the three left the colonel's office.

FULLY fifty soldiers began digging in the ruins the next morning. On the morning of the third day, one of the men uttered a sharp cry as his shovel bared a heavy iron ring. He scraped frantically, revealing it embedded in a square block of stone, which was fastened with a great, sliding bolt, so wedged and bent that sawing it into sections proved the only means of freeing it. The block was removed, and those nearest the trap were almost overwhelmed by a rush of foul air. Fallaise ran about excitedly.

"That door was bolted before the explosion," he cried, "by someone on

the outside. Men below were trapped like rats!"

His excitement increased as the descent down the flight of stairs revealed two other traps, similarly bolted. When these were opened, Cresson, seizing a powerful electric torch, sprang down the moldy stone steps.

"Littlejohn!" he shouted. "It is the same room—the very same that I escaped from, the morning you found me!"

The doctor with difficulty restrained Cresson, for the latter's excitement had gradually increased as the two had begun the descent with Fallaise and a group of six men. The electric torches of the Americans flashed over the vaulted ceiling, accentuating the shadows and festoons of cobwebs that hung from the stones like long fingers. Far away the searchers heard the rushing of water, which Cresson had described in relating his experience, and it seemed to the group that the sound arose from under the flagstones in a sort of indescribable roar. Suddenly their torches shone on a massive iron tripod, rising from the center of the chamber.

"The flood gate control!" Fallaise exclaimed in awed tones. "The levers are down, and yet neither magazine nor tunnels were ever flooded! The men were thought killed by shells, which destroyed this part of the fort, but this now shows that they arrived here!"

The officer was plainly puzzled, explaining that the machinery was one of the fort's most powerful weapons of defense before the wing was destroyed. At all times, he said, a detail of men stood in readiness to turn the waters of the Meuse into either the powder magazine or the tunnels, to render them useless to the enemy.

A horror-stricken exclamation came from Cresson, as the light of his torch fell upon the glint of dull gold from a huddled object on the flagstones. Drawing near, he perceived it to be a skeleton in the uniform of a French officer. A trench helmet lay beside the body, and a short distance away, an overcoat. The sight made members of the party gasp. Cresson stooped swiftly to examine the identifying bracelet about the bony wrist, leaping back with a gasp.

"Jules Chaumon!" he cried, reeling away from the spot.

A shout from one of the soldiers told that another skeleton had been found. Near it lay a third, and not far away, others, until the remains of thirty-three soldiers had been counted. Bending over the remains of Jules Chaumon, Cresson gave a startled groan, which brought the others running to his side. He pulled a sheaf of papers from the skeleton's belt and held it aloft.

"Send for the colonel," he commanded.

A soldier raced away and soon "Papa" Dupin arrived in the flood vault, excited and puffing.

"Bring the papers to my office," the colonel ordered, indicating that the two Americans were to follow him. "You, Fallaise, post a guard here, and see that no one enters. No one—mind you!"

He acknowledged the major's salute, and trotted away with Cresson and Littlejohn at his heels.

ONCE inside his office, "Papa" Dupin locked the door and turned up the flame of the lamp. The three drew their chairs together, as the colonel glanced through the documents hurriedly. He uttered a cry of amazement.

"My friends," he said, slowly, "the mystery of Fort Vaux's betrayal is solved! Jules Chaumon was no traitor, poor fellow, but a hero! He and thirty-three others were sent into eternity by another Frenchman, a traitor, who blew up the fort's maga-

zine from his concealed position in the anteroom. Here—read these!"

With this, the colonel thrust the thick packet of papers into Littlejohn's hands.

The documents included orders, maps and plans of vital importance to the defense of the garrison. Scrawled on the backs of the documents was a diary kept by Jules Chaumon up to the time of his death. On the first document were the lines:

"In the event that my body, and those of the other men, are ever found, I pray that these papers will aid in clearing up the manner in which we died."

These lines were written in Chaumon's bold style; and on the paper the three saw dark stains, doubtless of blood.

June 6, 1917.

Caught DeBray passing this packet of papers to a known enemy spy. How this fellow got inside of the fort I do not know. He ran at top speed in the opposite direction, when I closed in on DeBray and confronted him with the evidence of his treachery. The traitor pleaded with me not to expose him. He groveled on his knees. I shook him off, rat that he is. He has betrayed his country, and through him France may lose Verdun, her heart and soul. I went to the commandant's office this afternoon to expose him, but the colonel was not there. Must wait until tomorrow. DeBray cannot escape. He knows that I am watching!

June 7, 1917.

Only the colonel must hear my story, and this he cannot do this morning, because he is inspecting the trenches outside. Thus does the traitorous DeBray gain another day of grace. But what matters this, when he cannot escape? He watches me in terror. The Germans are but five hundred meters away. How much information DeBray has already given them I do not know. I must stop. The bugles are blowing like mad. There is an attack—everybody running to positions. Major Callan is shouting out my name and DeBray's. We are to take charge of a detail and go down into the flood vault.

June 7, 1917.

It is afternoon, and the attack continues. DeBray lingered behind. He knew I could not stop to drag him with us. Ah, had I only known his scheme, we should have avoided imprisonment in this dark vault. DeBray followed and bolted down the trap after the last man had gone through. We have thrown the flood levers, only to find them sawed from their connecting rods, below the vault, where we cannot repair them. The machinery is useless. The work of this traitor! Oh, the assassin! He opened the trap a minute ago, to tell us to say our prayers, to shout that he means to fire the magazine. He bolted down the trap before any of us could reach him. The papers in my belt! They would incriminate him!

June ?, 1917.

A terrible roar; a frightful shock. The whole fort came tumbling down over our heads, hours or days ago. We are buried. All of the poor fellows are either dead or wounded. I am covered with blood, and can hardly drag myself over the floor. Dying men are moaning and crying for water. There are thousands of gallons of it beneath us, and yet we cannot reach it. There is no food. We are doomed to die like rats!

June ?, 1917.

DeBray! Traitor! May the curse of dying men rest upon him! I am too weak to move, now, and writing is most painful. My matches are giving out. I hope death comes quickly. Have given up hope that we shall ever be found, either by our own men, or by the Germans. There is cannonading outside, but here we can only feel a muffled jar. The whole vault seems to tremble.

June ?, 1917.

Almost too weak to write. Can only move my hand. No matches. Writing in darkness! Too far gone to get my prayer book under my shoulders. If I could only see the sunshine again! God preserve my dear mother and my sister. . . . .

HERE the messages ended. The last was feebly scrawled, and Littlejohn deciphered it with much difficulty. Death had evidently overtaken Jules Chaumon shortly after he replaced the packet in his belt. The papers contained damning evidence against DeBray: one was a request from the enemy general, Von Mauck, for additional information as to the fort's weakest points. And his betrayal yielded Fort Vaux into the en-

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CROSSED LINES

by Robert G. Bowie and Robinson H. Harsh

I WAS lying in bed [thus began the tale told me by my fellow traveler, in the smoking car of the train]. The only other occupant of the room was a young woman in the cap and conventional costume of a nurse. From this, I promptly and rightly assumed that I was in a hospital; but to determine why this should be, I was considerably at a loss. My head ached; in fact, I ached more or less all over, and my thoughts did not collect themselves readily. A few minutes before (so I thought) I had been walking along the street, in the best of health. I had never been a victim of heart trouble or any other kind of attacks. I had never fainted in my life. With the exception of once, years before, when I had been somewhat banged up in a football scrimmage, I had never been sick. I was ruggedly healthy and considered myself above all things normal. Why, then, this?

Of a sudden, it came to me: the dimly lit, seemingly deserted street—not quite deserted, either; for now I remembered that as I started across it, there was another man coming toward me from the opposite side. Then, an automobile, without any warning, almost silently, had swung round the corner. I leapt to avoid it. The other pedestrian leapt also, as ill luck would have it, to the same side as I. We collided, and before we could recover, were struck. Beyond or after that, I could remember nothing.

"What time is it?" I asked of the girl.

"Ten-twenty," she answered.

"Ten-twenty! Ten-twenty, did you say? Why, how can that be? It was after 11 when—when it happened."

"You have been unconscious until just a little while ago. It is not surprizing that you have not realized the passage of time."

Of course! What a bonehead I was not to have noticed it before! It was daylight. Ten-twenty a. m.! Nearly twelve hours!

Rising upon my elbow, in spite of my bruises, "What day is this?" I shot at her.

"Wednesday, the fourteenth."

"Wednesday? Ten-twenty? Good Lord! There's a directors' meeting today. I must get out of here, at once."

"You cannot leave today," said the girl, calmly, and with what she evidently intended to be finality.

"Cannot? *Why* not? What is the extent of the damage?"

"There are no bones broken, but you must wait and talk to Dr. Cameroon."

"Piffle! Oh, well, tell Dr. What's-his-name to come here, immediately. My time is valuable—especially this morning."

She looked at me in a manner doubtless intended to convey that contempt was not altogether undiluted by pity for my abysmal ignorance and informed me that Dr. Cameroon was not one to be called hither and thither at the nod of anyone—certainly not an unknown recently picked up out of the gutter. In fact, I gathered that Dr. Cameron was quite a personage, in this particular circle at least, not to be spoken or thought of lightly. Well versed in the ,. tency of the tipping system, I looked about for my pocketbook; but not seeing either it or any of my clothes, I was compelled to substitute a promise of future performance.

Her chin went up in scorn; whether at the ignominious suggestion or at my inability to make it more immediately tangible I am unable to say: but perhaps it had some effect, after all. I did not, indeed, succeed in obtaining an audience with the potentate himself. Some exceedingly important event, whose nature did not particularly interest me at the time, had, it appeared, called him away, and it was impossible or unthinkable to get in touch with him; but I did obtain an interview with one of his colleagues or understrappers.

This person at first sternly forbade my leaving. Later he softened somewhat in the manner of expressing it, but insisted that he could not assume such a responsibility with one of Dr. Cameroon's patients.

Doubtless all this was reasonable enough; but it must be borne in mind that I was far from being an experienced invalid. I saw only the necessity of keeping an important appointment. Valuable time had already been consumed by my unconsciousness, over which I felt somehow humiliated; but, certain that I was not seriously hurt, I was determined not to permit further delay, merely to satisfy red-tape requirements.

I defied the doctor to show that, save for a few bruises, I was any the worse for my mishap, and he failed to do so. It would be tedious to repeat the whole conversation. There was evidently a strong reluctance toward permitting me to leave, and I think they would have resorted to almost any means to prevent it, had I not thrown something of a bluff, mentioning some influential personages and threatening to have my "uncalled-for detention" investigated by the police. It worked, and they yielded; or rather, their insistence stopped short of force. For permission or agreement I neither asked nor cared.

THE bringing of my clothes developed a fresh annoyance. They were obviously the wrong garments, but this was stubbornly denied. Several persons were called, who insisted in the most positive manner that this was the clothing in which I had been received. The argument nearly exhausted my patience, but at this juncture I recalled the other man, who, with me, had been stricken down. Doubtless we had been brought in the ambulance together. I suggested the probability that our clothing and other effects had been switched. This idea was scouted as impossible, in so well ordered an institution, but in view of my insistence, it was finally consented to investigate.

I had already noticed that my room communicated directly with another and that the door between the two was (for what purpose I did not inquire) kept open. I now learned that this second room was occupied by my fellow victim. Apparently he also had

gained his discharge, and from the sound of his voice, which he made no attempt to muffle, he also had discovered and was exasperated by the exchange. In epithets, inelegant but forcible, he denounced the whole staff as an aggregation of crooks or idiots (an estimate with which I had by now no inclination to take issue) and consigned them, jointly and severally, to eternal discomfort. Presumably, this unexpected reinforcement had some effect in shaking the prevalent confidence in infallibility, and the garments were re-exchanged.

This time I had the right clothes. Of that there could be no question, but still I was puzzled. I had noticed, when I had first left my bed, a marked decrease in the size of my limbs. It seemed out of reason that I should have lost so much flesh in so short a time. Now, when I was fully clothed, I found my garments astonishingly loose, and, inexplicably, my coat sleeves came down to my knuckles and I found it expedient to turn up the bottoms of my trousers.

So singular did all this seem that I began to wonder if I could be lightheaded as a result of the accident; but being too anxious to get away to risk introducing a question so likely to be seized upon as an excuse for prolonging my stay, I hastened to the office and settled with the institution's pecuniary representative. I was vaguely conscious of a strained sensation, whether physical or mental I could not determine. It made less impression upon me at the time than by remembrance, later. As I signed a document handed me, the appearance of my hand attracted my attention. It seemed shorter than of yore and blunter-fingered. I missed an old, familiar baseball finger. What the deuce!

I passed into the hall. A hatrack stood there, with a three-quarters length mirror. I glanced at it to see whether I cut a particularly unpresentable figure, and was almost overcome with astonishment. My hair, which had been light brown and slightly curly, was now jet black and as straight as an Indian's. The swarthy countenance, the nose, the eyes, the squat, ill-conditioned figure —but why enumerate details?—in none of these was there so much as a suggestion of my own. It was not my face. It was not my figure. It was not I!

AS I stood gazing in horrified incredulity (whether for seconds or minutes I do not know) I heard a step behind me, following along the way that I had come; and it was borne in upon me that there was something familiar—something very familiar—about that step. It stopped; and in the mirror, looking over the shoulder of that alien figure that had unaccountably become mine, I beheld that which caused me to gasp again. I dared not look around. When, at length, summoning all my force of will, I turned, there stood, confronting me in the flesh—incredible paradox!—myself.

There we stood, each gazing through another's eyes upon the lineaments that had been his own. Doubtless the newcomer was, like me, utterly dumfounded. The thing that had happened was so inexplicable, so incredible, that our mental processes were as if stunned. My mind groped in vain for some definitely established fact, some incontrovertible axiom from which to begin to reason. In vain, I say; for if a man has ceased to be himself, what supposedly established law may he regard as fixed? If I was not myself, who was I? If *I* did not know, what hope was there of receiving an explanation from another? For me, all established standards, all supposed knowledge, had suddenly become as nothing. The universe seemed turned inside out. The world might, any moment, dissolve into a puff of vapor.

You may smile that I thought of such vast cosmic revolution as a possible accompaniment of phenomena affecting but two obscure individuals at most; but *you* have not passed through such an experience. You would not have smiled had you been in my place.

For the time, at least, reason had deserted me, leaving me an abject prey to fear, the primitive instinct to flee from the monstrous and incomprehensible.

I turned and fled—fled to the street. Purpose I had none. I fled, spurred by blind, unreasoning, panic-stricken terror, but not for long. I was brought to a sudden halt by a sensation such as I find it difficult to describe. It was not merely nausea, not merely suffocation. There were these, but they were only accompanying symptoms. I felt that I was collapsing—on the point of being turned inside out, like a glove or sock. That is the nearest I can come to describing the sensation. There was no suggestion of physical force, but I knew instinctively, or by some means transcending both instinct and reason, that another onward step would rend life from me.

I halted. I turned about and began to retrace my steps. Facing me, I saw also returning that other, the man who had exchanged faces and bodies with me. On his face were pallor, fear, and horror of death but recently and narrowly escaped; and I knew by that expression, so accurately mirroring my own feelings, that he had passed through an experience similar to my own.

At least, it had had a partially steadying effect. The first stampeding impulse of panic was past. Reason, for a time suspended, was groping to reassert itself. The utterances of that uncanny conversation are too hazy in my remembrance to be quoted. The strangeness of our position, the difficulty of differentiation between "you" and "I", was as yet too great. What I said and what he said seem inextricably intertwined.

Certain points began to stand out, acceptable as demonstrated fact. He and I represented new combinations of what had previously constituted two distinct units: myself and the man who had approached me from the opposite side of the street and had with me been struck by the car at the moment of our attempt to pass each other. We had reawakened with the mental personality of each transferred to the body of the other. One more demonstrated fact had been discovered. We were no longer independent units. In some intangible way we had become an inseparable couple. The two members composing it could not exist alone. A few yards comprized the limit that we could wander apart. An attempt to go beyond this imperiled the lives of both. Repeated experiments proved the certainty of this last.

MY APPOINTMENT had at first been forgotten, in the face of this monstrous happening. Upon recalling it, I at once perceived the impossibility of keeping it, in my altered guise. We sat side by side upon a doorstep, and for a while I did some silent thinking.

"It may be," I said at length, "that this head doctor can throw some light upon our singular predicament. Let us go back to the hospital, find out where he is and get hold of him at once."

My companion attempted to insert his hands into the pockets of the trousers stretched almost to bursting about his hips and loins, and extended his long legs as far as their constricting encasement permitted. The tightness of his coat gave a hunched appearance to his shoulders, and his vest gaped open, failing by two or three inches to meet the waistband of his trousers. He had evidently found it

necessary to abandon the attempt to fasten his collar. Looking at him, I vaguely wondered that my person could be so grotesque. A grin gradually spread across his features.

"Not on your life," he said slowly. "Not if the court knows itself!"

Apparently he was turning over in his mind some thought that was pleasant to him, for once or twice he emitted a grating chuckle that strained his buttons.

"See here!" he said presently, "you say you're the president or general manager or something of a big concern?"

I nodded, and again he chuckled before finishing.

"Well," he said, "I'm its boss now."

"You?"

I stopped. This was a phase of the situation that had not occurred to me until now.

"Sure! Fat chance *you'd* have at your old job. You'd never get past the office boy."

True—I had already realized that.

"But what do you know about the business?" I asked.

"As much, I guess, as most of those big bugs. All a fellow needs is to get the chance, and I've got mine, all right enough."

Passing over the folly of this last speech: why not, indeed? Might it not, after all, be the best temporary solution of this unheard-of problem? Properly dressed, he would at least pass for me in so far as the eye was concerned, which I certainly could not. True, he possessed neither technical training nor experience to qualify him in the slightest degree for the task; but these disadvantages, I hoped to offset. My plan was that he, employing the authority that was mine, should hire me in an obscure clerical capacity that would keep me constantly at his elbow. I would then be in a position to forestall his every action and instruct him in the proper procedure.

After all, it would be but a makeshift to tide things over until some more reasonable readjustment should become possible; for that some sane solution of this nightmare must eventually be found, I could not but believe.

It was no doubt a desperate, almost mad, undertaking; but the interests of those I served, no less than my own (so I sought to convince myself), justified the attempt.

Hazardous as it was and unpromising of continued success, it might not have proved impossible but for the attitude and behavior of my partner in this singular union. Never having held a position of authority nor been capable of discharging its duties, he saw in such an opening only opportunities of being pompous and overbearing. Of responsibility he had no idea. His conception of authority was to be a bullying despot, and his ignorance was too profound for him to be conscious of his own blunders. While in some measure availing himself of my assistance, without which he could not have held the post for an hour, he affected to despise it. He sought to conceal his dependence upon me by contemptuous treatment and public reprimands. He possessed sufficient low cunning to realize and take advantage of my defenselessness. He knew that it would be hopeless for me to declare myself, and sensed that I regarded his occupancy as temporary, hoping to recover my own eventually. He figured that the success of the venture was more vital to me than to him. At least he would enjoy his power to the full, in his own way, while it was in his grasp.

ONE incident from among many may serve as a sample of his conduct. In order for me to draw money from the bank, it was necessary for me to do so through him. To appear

there as myself was, of course, out of the question. I might have gotten around the difficulties of identification, but I found myself unable to imitate convincingly my own signature. He, however, having once seen the original, had no difficulty about reproducing it. So it was he who signed and presented my check, receiving the amount called for without arousing the slightest suspicion either as to the genuineness of the signature or his identity. Thereafter, when, allowing him a liberal commission for his service, I demanded the residue of what was lawfully my own, with the brazenest effrontery he refused me so much as a penny. When I insisted, he treated my pretensions with contempt, defying me to substantiate my claim or to produce a witness to its truth.

It was a busy banking day, and here and there among the crowd I recognized several to whom I was known. But what of that? Every man of them could only be an additional witness to the absurdity of my contention. As there swept over me a full realization of my absolute helplessness at the hands of this scoundrel, my innocent forfeiture of all the rights and protection of civilization, a frenzy of desperation took possession of me. I lost my head and sprang at him, like a wildcat.

I am, as you can see, a well-grown man; but I had been the loser physically as well as otherwise by the exchange. I had some knowledge of boxing, but that art requires co-ordination—teamwork of brain and body, acquired only through practise. My unaccustomed members failed to move swiftly enough for me to profit by my knowledge. I was merely a small man assailing a larger one, with all the advantages in favor of the latter. The outcome was not for a moment in doubt. His fist, driven by the muscles that had once been mine, crashed into my face and I went down.

A policeman appeared, and my opponent coolly charged me with assaulting and attempting to rob him. A score of witnesses corroborated his statement. Imagine my situation: robbed of my savings in broad daylight, knocked down by my own fist, denounced by my friends, and finally given into custody as a thief for attempting to recover my own.

But there was yet one card that I could play. Drawing near to him and speaking low so that no other might hear, I muttered through my crushed and bleeding lips, "Fool! Have you forgotten the invisible bond that links us together? Have me thrown into jail if you will; but you must accompany me. If not, the moment that the door shuts between us seals not only my doom but your own."

I had hit home. That was a detail of which he had not thought. The cruel sneer died upon his lips and his face turned sickly white. He stammered and shivered in his fright—sought to undo what his own words had brought about. It was now my turn to look on, smiling and sneering; for so keen was the gratification afforded me by his terror that my own fate receded into the background, becoming for a time almost a matter of indifference.

He withdrew the charges, mumbled something about my not being accountable for my actions. "A poor creature," he said, for whom he felt responsible—sorry that he had temporarily lost patience with me—"usually harmless"—would have to watch me more carefully in future—and so on. Extricating himself with difficulty from an avalanche of inquiries and condolences, he finally got away; and I, of course, with him.

The incident had no chastening effect upon him. His conduct at the office was as foolish, boorish and insulting as of yore. Although the directors had no ray of insight into the true state of affairs, it was not long

before it was realized that something was very much amiss. His resignation (or rather mine) was finally demanded and, after some blustering and foul language on his part, received.

Much deeper was the impression made upon me. Life had been to me somewhat like the moon, which throughout all its varying phases presents to the beholder upon Earth always the same side. Life had suddenly been turned, and I viewed it now from the side that had hitherto been invisible to me. During boyhood and since, I had been above the average in size and strength. In justice to myself, I cannot say that I had used these natural advantages to become a bully; but like most others similarly endowed, I had vaguely felt them as constituting a merit, a virtue, creditable to me and praiseworthy. Instinctively I had felt a slight contempt for others less fortunate. In school I had had no difficulty in upholding my rights by physical force and had been ready enough to resort to this means of settling arguments when I sensed it to be the least difficult way for me. As a consequence I had come to be regarded as somewhat of a hero, and had acquired followers and admirers.

I realized, now, how undeserved had been my own and others' estimate of me. I had never feared my fellowman; but in that pseudo-courage there had been nothing truly admirable. It was but the natural outgrowth of the knowledge that in a physical encounter between the average boy or man and me, the cards were always stacked against him. I was never taking as big a risk as was he. Not only had this been the case in all my schoolboy battles, but I had had this sense of preponderance of physical power upon my side all through life. From it had proceeded the aggressiveness that had won me recognition and respect. What an asset it had been in the accomplishment of such success as I had attained! How naked and helpless were my other qualities now that I was deprived of it! For the first time I began to respect, even marvel at, the unapplauded heroes who, unlike me, had fought with the knowledge that superior force was pitted against them.

The loss of my position had deprived me of means of earning a livelihood, and I had learned the futility of inviting another fiasco by a similar attempt elsewhere. He, for his part, disdaining even a pretense of work, continued to draw and squander my savings, throwing to me only the barest crumbs necessary to existence.

RUINED in fortune and prospects, I would have attempted to start life anew. The prestige of my name and reputation were, of course, assets upon which I could no longer count; but I still had knowledge and experience, intrinsic merits which might be counted upon to raise me again to a station in the world such as I had lost. But alas! All such hopes were blasted by the knowledge that it was impossible for me to exist apart from him.

I have read somewhere that in antiquity, under the Roman Empire, it was customary to fasten to a condemned criminal a corpse, which must be dragged with him whenever he moved. I thought of those poor wretches. The loathing with which their living flesh must have shrunk from the corruption tethered to them could not have exceeded mine toward the hateful partner yoked to me by a bond no less potent because invisible and intangible.

As our fortunes sank, my companion—my enemy—my evil genius—advanced from insult to brutality. Goaded beyond endurance, I sometimes, at the first, attempted to meet force with force; but I was no match for him. He deliberately tormented me into these encounters for the pleasure afforded him by pounding me into sub-

mission. I almost constantly bore one or more black eyes, swollen features and bruised body. Taught by painful and humiliating experience the uselessness of resistance, I became cowed. I, whose spirit had once been so high, cringed under his bestial taunts and threats.

Public opinion? Fair play? Poof! He was admired, catered to, fawned upon, while respectable people turned with disgust from my distorted countenance.

For my hatred toward him, ample cause is not far to seek. His hatred toward me may seem at first sight less readily explicable. In part it may have proceeded from the ill-understood discovery that, after all, success does not depend entirely upon getting a chance; that the possession of another man's job, name, clothing, bank account, even his body, may still leave something short of equality with him. Perhaps, in part, it proceeded from that curious instinct to heap wrongs upon one already wronged. These may have been contributing causes, but there was another, more subtle and insidious, more deadly and damnable. I know of it through personal experience. The thing that I found most unendurable was certainly not physical pain. That I would have held lightly. It was not even insult, outrage and humiliation. It was the everlasting propinquity—the interminable nearness to each other—its unescapableness—the total absence of privacy—the necessity of being every moment under the observation of the same person. It was like water dropping incessantly upon the same spot. It was like eating forever of one food. The best of friends could not have endured it.

The sound of his voice became an agony to me. I would close my eyes to shut out the sight of him. I could not sleep, because of his presence in the same or an adjoining room. And allowing for differences of temperament, these effects must have been more or less the same with him as with me.

Often, glancing at him, I caught an expression like to that of a ravening beast of prey contorting the features that had once been mine, and I knew that in his heart was murder, as in truth it was in my own. But one consideration, I am sure, restrained him from carrying his desire into execution: the fear lest my death would involve his. As for me, from life had long since been wrung all that had made it desirable, and I regarded its relinquishment as of little consequence. So, for a time, we lived together, more like hydrophobia-crazed dogs than human beings, every other purpose in life becoming hourly more and more deeply submerged in the overpowering longing to rend and destroy each other.

THE inevitable came at last. It matters little what trivial incident was its immediate forerunner and ostensible provocation. With a bellow of rage and long pent-up hate, he hurled himself upon me. We closed in a deadly embrace and I fell with his greater weight on top of me. A table was overturned by my fall and an electric lamp that had stood on it crashed to the floor. The bulbs shattered, leaving us in darkness. I clawed and tore with the desperation of despair, but his powerful hands clutched and kneaded my throat, and I knew that life was being strangled out of me. I clutched at his throttling fingers, striving to bend them backward, one by one. In vain! I desisted, and with a final, spasmodic effort flung my hands wide. The fingers of my right hand came in contact with something—something hard. It was the lamp. I could touch it, but it was a little too far away for me to grasp it. That little meant so much. I shoved

(Continued on Page 173)

Author of "Thus Spake the Prophetess," "Luisma's Return," etc.

ANDREA had appealed to many men in the heyday of her youth. More than one man had dishonored his family name and proved faithless to some better woman for Andrea. It would have been difficult for any one to tell just why this should be. Looking at her, one would be hard put to it to understand wherein lay her appeal to the male of the species. Yet history shows that through her many an otherwise good man had become outcast because of a careless smile from her thick lips. She was once a president's favorite. She once fled from a good husband and journeyed across the Dominican Republic to hold high carnival with a simple chauffeur. She was a strange mixture of Amazon, Cro-Magnon, Circe and Lucrezia Borgia. No magazine would ever dare publish the details of her long line of conquests.

She died with her back against a stone wall and her face toward a negro firing squad.

She was forty years of age, the mother of a demented son, the wife of a good man whose name she had borne for twenty-two years, and the mistress of a black *gavillero!* The latter faced the firing squad before her and she, knowing that her turn was coming within a brace of seconds, calmly asked the corporal of the firing squad for a cigarette. She lighted it without a tremor of her huge hands, drew the smoke deep into her lungs, flicked away the bit of ash and said:

"Puh, Lolo was afraid to die! And to think that I am to face the firing squad for the sake of vermin like that! Are you ready, corporal?"

"AREN'T you coming to bed, Andrea?"

It was the petulant voice of Pedro Andujar. The bedsprings creaked dismally as Pedro turned his face impatiently toward the wall. He never had understood this fiery woman he had taken to wife.

"In a moment, perhaps, Pedro," answered Andrea in honeyed tones.

Hearing those tones and not seeing the woman, one would instinctively have visioned a woman built on the plan of a Lady Godiva. He would never have thought of a woman shaped like a stuffed mattress, hands large and red from much labor, stringy hair and dirty dresses. And if he had looked into her eyes before noticing her body he would never have noticed the body at all, for Andrea's eyes were the curse that the

devil had placed upon her at her birth. Pedro put her from his mind and composed himself for sleep—in this instance the final sleep for Pedro.

Finally from the bedroom which the hut boasted came the gentle snores of Pedro. Softly, lest the creaky rocking-chair give away her movements, Andrea arose to her feet and walked to the closed door. Her feet made no sound as she walked. She was like a great cat, moving swiftly and silently. Could the man outside who awaited her signal have seen her eyes as she glided forward, no one could have blamed him had he turned and plunged into the depths of the jungle that began a hundred yards or so in rear of the house. Those eyes were the eyes of a basilisk or of a snake—cold as starlight—glittering.

What Lolo saw was the eyes of his loved one, between whom and himself was naught but the gentle Pedro who slept in the darkened bedroom beyond the half-closed door. He would have taken the woman in his arms, but she motioned him back with an imperious gesture. For just an instant Lolo caught a glimpse of the fiend that lurked behind the eyes of Andrea. Then the fiend slunk away as Andrea smiled at her paramour.

Lolo stood with his back against the wall. His eyes questioned the woman, proof positive that these two understood each other. She looked at Lolo's belt, and there was contempt in her expression when she noticed that he carried neither machete nor knife. He spread his hands wide in the expressive gesture of the Latin, that gesture which says so plainly: "Well, I forgot it; what is there to be done about the matter?"

Andrea looked swiftly about her. Lolo might lose his courage at the last moment—might desire with all his heart to be well out of the whole affair. Not so Andrea. What she planned she carried out, regardless of the consequences. She looked about the hut for a weapon. Her glance came to rest on the glass chimney of the lamp that rested on the single table of the hut. Her eyes narrowed speculatively as she studied the lamp. The top of the chimney had been broken off, leaving a ragged and serrated edge. Andrea moved a step forward, hand outstretched. The black face of Lolo became a muddy gray as he grasped an inkling of her purpose. He raised his hand above his eyes, saying in that wordless language with which these two rogues of necessity conversed with each other:

"My God, Andrea! Not that! Not that!"

Andrea moved toward Lolo. She stood facing him, her eyes boring into his, charming him as if she had been a snake in sober fact and he a helpless sparrow. Under her contempt the bone in Lolo's spine stiffened. His lips became a straight line as he answered her silent challenge. He nodded his head grimly. Then the two sprang into action—swift action led by Andrea because she wished her will to be carried out before Lolo could weaken again. Andrea seized the chimney and plunged it into an earthen water urn beside the door. It cooled instantly, while the jagged edge cracked again. It was a sinister weapon. Andrea held the broken chimney as she motioned Lolo toward the door of the bedroom. She was right at his heels as he leaped through the door.

He hesitated for a single instant. Andrea seized his arm with her free hand, and he winced under her fierce clutch. He saw her face in the flickering light from the swaying flame of the lamp in the other room, and to him the flame reflected in her eyes was the flame from the pit itself. But under the lash of her glance he acted. He seized the head of the luckless Pedro with his left hand. With his right he drove a terrific blow to the jaw of the stupefied man. With a

sigh Pedro relaxed. Then Andrea became a hell-cat in very truth. She leaped upon the chest of her husband and slashed with the broken chimney.

Lolo watched her for a moment. He could stand no more. He fled from the room and from the house, and stood outside against the wall, panting like a spent runner and wiping the cold sweat from his black forehead. He wanted to run—run—run! But the night was suddenly peopled with grotesque and terrible shadows. He could neither run nor stay. Just what he would have done in another moment no one might say. Andrea came to the doorway and spoke calmly in his ear.

"What are you running for? Our work is done—most of it. We have the remainder of the night in which to complete it!"

Lolo, walking in a daze, followed this throwback to the Borgias back into the charnel house, and stepped across the threshold into the fatal chamber. He noticed that the lamp no longer flickered. The glow shone strangely through the crimsoned chimney that Andrea had returned to its proper place. They two picked up in the bedclothes all that was mortal of Pedro—a crimson and many-pieced mass. Hurriedly Lolo folded the clothing over to hide that horror from his own gaze. Andrea was as calm as if nothing at all had happened. They moved out of the hut and to its rear. A pit was dug beside the Andujar cistern. In a few minutes there was nothing to show what had happened but a plot of fresh earth which was even now being smoothed out by the broad feet of Andrea. The house was darkened and Andrea walked away into the night with Lolo.

THE frightened and bemuddled native who faced the colored police lieutenant knew that something dreadful had happened.

"I tell you, lieutenant," he said, "all is not well at the house of Pedro Andujar! There is a strange odor about the place and Andrea has, for the past five days, been living openly in the house of Lolo, the *gavillero!* There should be an investigation!"

The lieutenant turned to a private of police, who was listening to every word, with his mouth wide open as if he would have the words fly into it.

"Take two other men—no, five other men—with you and go to the house of Lolo. Arrest Andrea and the black man and bring them to the house of Pedro, where I shall await your coming."

The private saluted and hurried away. The lieutenant and his informant stepped out of the *oficina de policia* and hurried to the house of Pedro Andujar. Word had already gotten about, and the crowd that had gathered beside the fatal hut was constantly augmented by additions from other houses near by. The lieutenant sniffed the air and his face became gray. He had been in more than one revolution and knew the odor of death.

"What do you want of me, lieutenant?" asked a calm voice behind him.

He looked around and Andrea Andujar was smiling in his face!

"Where is your husband?" demanded the lieutenant.

His voice was shaking as if he had been suffering with the ague.

Calmly Andrea smiled again and shook her head.

"My God, I'll tell! She did it! She made me help her!"

And Lolo, all self-control gone from him because of five nights during which he had seen the darkness filled with crimson shadows, broke away from his captors and hurried to the rear of the hut. He fell upon his knees beside a square of fresh earth and began to dig furiously with his bare hands. Some of the crowd, sick-

ened, gave back from the crazed black. Others, more curious, stepped closer, breath shortened. In five minutes the horror was disclosed.

ANDREA refused the mask when she turned to face the firing squad. She was the first woman within the memory of Santo Domingo to be sentenced to death. In all the crowd of two thousand people massed behind the firing squad there was not a single expression of sympathy. Andrea had confessed, sparing no single detail of that terrible night in the hut. She seemed to gloat over the horror that she saw in the faces of her listeners. The story had spread like wildfire, and people looked at her as they would have gazed at some terrible monster brought to life from the age of stone. When asked if she had anything to say she waved the priest contemptuously aside and said:

"Hell, no! Let's get the *fiesta* over with!"

The corporal of the firing squad raised his hand.

"Make ready!"

Andrea placed her closed fists upon her hips and smiled.

"At the heart take aim!"

Andrea smiled!

"Fire!"

Andrea, still smiling, deliberately began to walk toward the firing squad! The eight negroes, only two of whom had fired blanks, broke and fled as they saw this terrible, smiling creature advancing toward them, a great crimson stain on her waist above her heart! Andrea laughed in derision as she fell upon her face and rolled over on her back.

The police lieutenant ran forward and gave her the shot of mercy. The doctor knelt at her side, cut away her clothing and examined her wounds. The six bullet holes could have been covered with the palm of a little woman's hand! The spectators crowded around to see. The doctor was the closest of them all, but for a moment he did not notice that which the crowd noticed at once, and which caused them to gasp in horror and amaze. Then he, too, noticed, and his face became as gray as ashes; for those six bullet wounds had, guided by a strange freak of chance, formed a curious pattern above the heart of the murderess.

The pattern made one think at once of a tiny lamp-chimney!

NOTE—*"Desert of the Dead," the second story in this series of "Strange Tales From Santo Domingo," will be published in next month's issue of* WEIRD TALES.

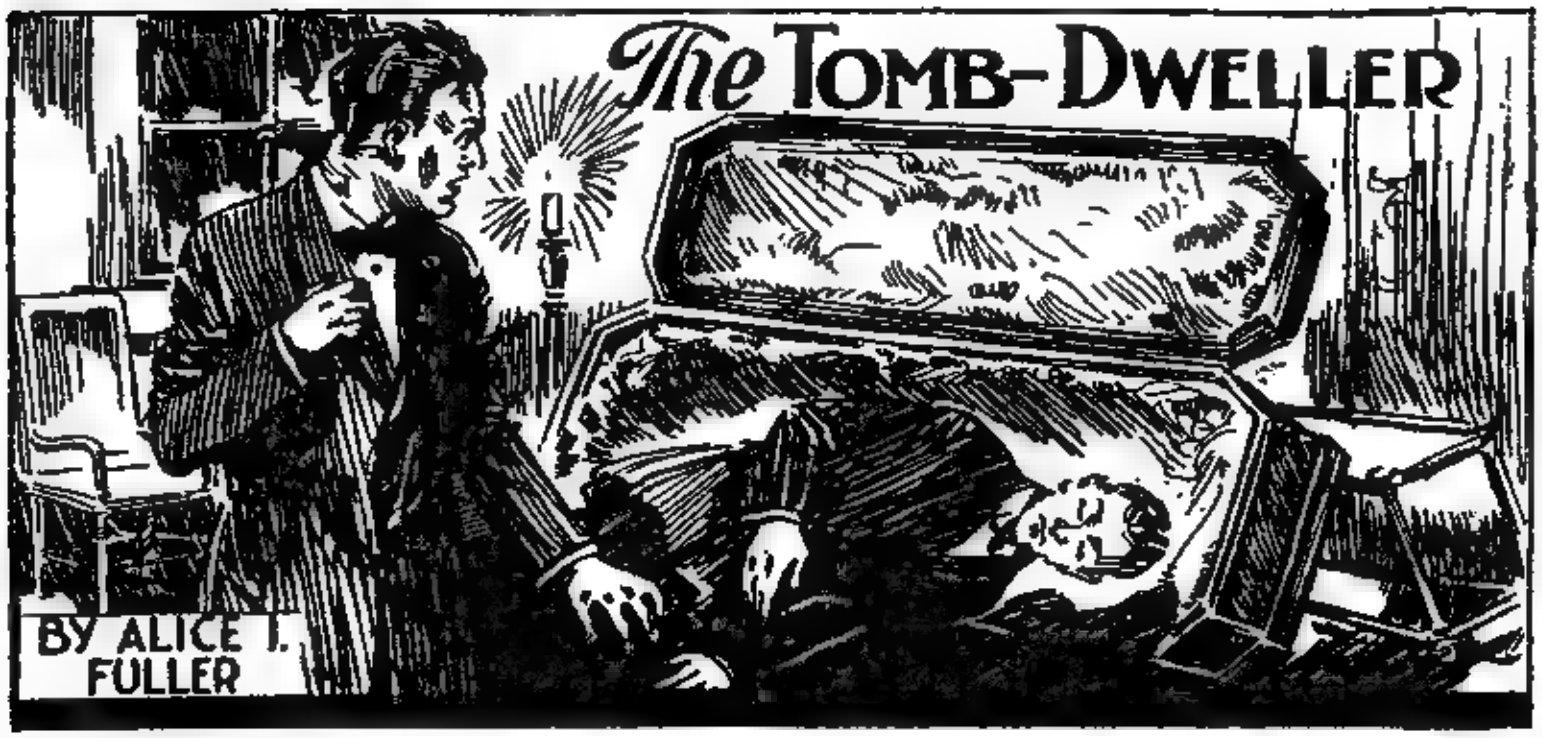
In the March WEIRD TALES

The Composite Brain

By ROBERT CARR

The story of a monster, created out of living tissue by an insane scientist

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS FEBRUARY FIRST



PROWLING about in graveyards may not be an exhilarating pastime for the average person, but it has always been my favorite diversion. My earliest recollection is of the insatiable craving for grim and ghostly things that has dominated my life.

While other youths of my age were engaged in sports or strolling along quiet lanes arm in arm with the maidens of their choice, I was often amusing myself by roaming among the graves of the countryside ancestry or by perching on the dilapidated rail fence that surrounded the neglected village burying ground, trying to visualize the portentous spectacle when all those tombs should burst asunder at the sound of Gabriel's trumpet and the moldering skeletons within them should stalk rustily forth to take their places at the bar of Judgment.

When thus employed, my morbid imagination would regale me with ghastly visions of doleful nodding skulls borne aloft by fleshless limbs that creaked timorously onward.

Among my most valued possessions are several notebooks which contain much graveyard lore as well as all the epitaphs I have gleaned from a varied assortment of tombstones. Many of these stones were mottled with moss and lichen and crumbling with age, but I found them to be of even more absorbing interest than their modern neighbors, whose cold perfection was as yet unsullied.

Delving for hidden treasure could not have fascinated me more than the deciphering of dim legends on the rigid faces of ancient, time-scarred memorials. When a lad, I enjoyed glibly reciting the most dismal of these productions, to the horror or disgust of my hearers. One inscription, of which I was then especially fond, proclaimed the following mandatory reminder of our common fate:

Reflect, my friend, as you pass by,
As you are now so once was I.
As I am now so you must be;
Prepare for death and follow me.
From out the grave I speak today
To you who now are on the way
To join the millions turned to dust:
There's no escape, for die you must.

These terse lines repeated in sepulchral tones never failed to grate upon the ears of my audience.

As I grew older my retinue of graveyards was extended by means of a motorcycle, until there was none within a hundred miles with which I was not as familiar as with the ceme-

tery in my immediate neighborhood. My fondness for the society of the dead weaned the living from me. One by one, even my closest relatives deserted me, until finally only my mother tolerated me.

They would suddenly think of some urgent errand that must be attended to at once, if I was seen approaching. I would find the family living room emptied soon after I had entered it, and the loafers on the store porch would drift away simultaneously whenever I neared their rendezvous.

At times I resented this, but usually it amused me. People had grown to dread my presence because I never neglected an opportunity of discoursing on death and the grave. "He has studied tombstones so much that he looks like one" once floated back to my ears from a retreating group, but I was undisturbed by such remarks.

My father left a competence sufficient to provide each of his three children with a comfortable income; therefore I was free to devote my life to the peculiar pursuit that appealed to me.

The death of my mother severed the last link that bound me to my childhood home, excepting the graves of my kindred. Strange as it may seem, these mounds were more attractive to me than many of those that rested beneath them had ever been when they were alive.

After the death of my mother, my elder brother insisted that the homestead be sold and the proceeds divided. I then resolved to spend the remainder of my life visiting every graveyard I could find.

Accordingly I purchased a high-powered automobile, had it fitted with every convenience for comfort and safety, employed a callow youth who knew practically nothing but how to drive a car prudently, and started on my journey. A companion who was capable of asking pertinent questions or of being annoyed, as most normal persons are, by my odd characteristics and aim in life, was not desirable.

We traveled deliberately. There was no need of haste, and I was determined to overlook no spot that harbored the bones of a departed member of the human race. Whenever such appeared, I left my man in the car and began investigations.

Gloatingly I threaded my way amidst myriads of graves. Some were dreary, sunken and weed-grown. Others were beautifully rounded and covered with gay, nodding flowers, smilax, or graceful ferns. Occasionally I would find the grounds skillfully laid out with winding, flower-bordered walks and radiant with fanciful beds of coleus and geraniums. But most of the surroundings bore piteous evidence that the dead are soon forgotten. Ugly weeds filled the grounds and long, strangling brier tentacles tripped the feet, scratched the hands and tore the clothing of any one who ventured among them.

Despite all obstacles, the most satisfying hours of my life were spent strolling leisurely among the tombs, reading the inscriptions on the stones and pondering on the futility of the struggle for wealth, fame and all the other vain and fleeting things for which humanity contends.

ALMOST a year had passed happily in this manner and we were traveling through a delightful part of New England near the close of a glowing spring day, when I espied a most attractive cemetery crowning a symmetrical elevation a short distance from the highway. An avenue lined with majestic trees led upward to the ornate iron gate that closed the entrance to the grounds.

It was a beautiful scene that met my eyes as I loosened the latch and stepped inside the gate. The walks and drives were laid out with puritanical precision and paved with broad slabs of stone. Directly in

front of the entrance a large block of the finest white marble was mounted on a handsome granite base. Standing forth in bold relief upon the flawless surface were Gray's immortal words: "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." Never did that exquisite line appeal so vividly to me as when I stood there and gazed about me in that princely city of the dead.

Stately monuments reared their glistening heads on every side, intermingled with many less lofty but no less faultless triumphs of the sculptor's art. It was plain that many dwellers in that peaceful haven of rest had trod the paths of glory to their ultimate destination. Illustrious names "famed in song and story" and familiar to every urchin in the land gleamed forth upon those noble memorials.

The air was vibrant with the song of birds and laden with the fragrance of the trailing arbutus, that sweet, modest flower so dear to the heart of the New Englander. Many of the shaded graves were carpeted with the clinging tendrils of these plants, and other artless flower faces peeped here and there among the greenery. There were no fallen tombstones, no broken, moss-grown slabs. All was neat and revealed the touch of skilled and loving hands.

Passing slowly along, making notes in my memorandum book and drinking in the beauty and sublimity with which I was surrounded, I finally came to the farther slope of the hill. Here the graves were few but not neglected, and I saw a small stone building, evidently a private vault. There were tiny grated windows on either side and the structure was partly under the surface of the ground, it having been built into the side of the hill.

A tall ventilator rose above the roof, and on approaching I was surprized to see a small chimney, which had been hidden from view by the ventilator. I attempted to peer in at one of the little windows, but could discern nothing, as the glass had been rendered opaque. I then passed around to the front of the structure. A stone slab served as a door. There was no sign of a fastening on it except a hole that had been drilled through it, evidently for a cord to pass to the outside for the lifting of an inner latch.

As I stood there regarding the building with curiosity, the door suddenly opened and an aged man appeared on the threshold. He startled me, as I had thought the place unoccupied, at least by the living.

The man gazed at me with a look of extreme hostility and asked curtly, "Why are you spying at my home in this way?"

"Home?" I echoed. "Surely you don't live here, do you?"

"Indeed I do! Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, you see I thought this building a vault until I saw the chimney on it. After that I was puzzled and wondered what it was intended for, but it never occurred to me that it might be a dwelling."

"When you have lived as long as I have, you will know better than to judge things by their appearance," was the cold reply.

"Excuse me," I ventured. "I didn't mean to be rude. You've chosen a most beautiful environment in which to live."

The stranger eyed me piercingly for an instant, then said, "Do you really mean that?"

"Certainly, I mean it. I envy you your neighbors. Most people are more afraid of dead men than of live ones, but I prefer the peaceful, unobtrusive dead every time."

The old man's deep-set black eyes lighted with pleasure.

"Ah," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together gleefully, "you're the man I've been looking for these many years. Sit here and chat with me."

He indicated a bench beside the door. It was gratifying to meet this strange character. Feeling that his ideas might accord with my own and that we should find mutual enjoyment in each other's company, I was glad of the opportunity to talk with him.

He was an intelligent-looking man of above average height, well-proportioned, with broad shoulders and long sinewy arms. His hair and silken beard were long, but well kept and of dazzling whiteness. He had the chastened expression of one who has suffered much and walked patiently within the shadow, and his broad brow was furrowed as by intense thought. Yet he had an air of contentment that a monarch might envy.

We seated ourselves on the bench and conversed on topics of general interest. In response to his questions I told him of my obsession and consequent journeyings.

He was much interested, and when I finished he grasped my hand and exclaimed fervently: "Thank God that I have met you! No man has ever entered my home, but I want you to come inside with me. You will then be able more fully to understand what I am resolved to tell you. The story is not a pleasant one. When you have heard it you will know why I live as I do and why I prefer dead neighbors."

I followed my host into his dwelling. It contained only one room, but a curtain was drawn across one end, dividing it into two apartments. A small stove, a rude, home-made table, one decrepit chair, a well-filled bookcase and a stool completed the visible furnishings. We seated ourselves and my companion began his story.

"I AM what might be called a southern Yankee. My father was a Confederate captain and my mother a dyed-in-the-wool Yankee, whose parents disowned her when she eloped with the dashing young officer in gray. My twin brother Ronald and I were born in Alabama in the midst of the chaos following the Civil War, and our boyhood days were darkened by the fearful struggle for existence experienced by the people of the South at that time.

"You and I seem to have similar inclinations now, but I was quite your opposite when a lad, for a haunting fear of being buried alive made an abject coward of me. Consequently I had no liking for graveyards or what was in them. I was subject to a sort of catalepsy, the exact nature of which was never determined. My parents thought the condition might have resulted from an injury inflicted upon me when an infant.

"At any rate, I had several attacks of more or less severity, during which I appeared to be dead. I could hear all that was said but couldn't move a muscle. Usually I soon recovered, but on one occasion the authorities insisted that I be buried, as I had been pronounced dead by the physician and the coronor, but my mother refused to listen to them, declaring she would not believe me gone until she could see signs of decomposition. If she had lived a few years longer the things I am about to relate to you would never have happened. My parents and I were reticent about my seizures. Even my brother was ignorant of their character, and the subject was painful to us.

"Naturally I lived in constant dread of another attack, and you can imagine with what apprehension I watched my faithful mother growing older and frailer from year to year, for, aside from all else she meant to me, her demise might mean my premature burial.

"I had reached the age of nineteen when mother passed away and my father, who was devoted to her, followed her in less than a year. The old home seemed so desolate after our parents were gone that Ronald and I

decided to dispose of it. We sold it and settled on a plantation in a thinly populated part of Georgia.

"The neighbors were few and far between, but we enjoyed the seclusion and my health seemed improved by the change. I had taken treatment, and hadn't had a cataleptic attack for several years. I had great hopes that I was cured or had outgrown the trouble entirely. Then the dreaded blow fell like a bolt from the blue. I was pronounced dead while in the throes of an attack of more severity than any previous one. The physician who was called knew nothing of my former attacks and declared me a victim of heart failure.

"Shortly after moving to our new home, Ronald and I had fallen in love with the attractive daughter of our nearest neighbor. She had found it difficult to decide which was which of us, as Ronald and I were identical in appearance, but love had found a way and the girl we both loved had promised to be my wife.

"As soon as we became engaged, she had tried to discourage the attentions of my brother, in as kind a manner as she could, but I became the object of his most violent anger and from that time on it was very hard for me to get along with him.

"Thus it was that our relations were rather strained at the time I was stricken, which was a month after my engagement. The horrible fate that had dogged my footsteps for so many years fell upon me when least expected.

"It is impossible for me to describe fully the anguish of mind I experienced while being prepared for and awaiting burial. If you have ever been in the paralyzing clutches of a nightmare and helplessly watched the approach of some awful doom, you may have a faint conception of the agony I passed through.

"Each hideous detail of my ghastly plight tortured me without mercy. I imagined the lowering of my body into the grave—the hollow thud of the clods that followed it. The smell of the dank, cold earth rose in my nostrils. I felt the creeping of the slimy worms that would soon rob me of human semblance. The ordeal of slow suffocation in abysmal darkness flaunted its horrors before me. Grim death leered and beckoned, and I knew there was no one that would save me.

"On that fatal morning I could hear the old negro wench, who acted as our housekeeper, as she shuffled about crooning dismally, dusting and arranging the chairs in the seldom-used parlor where my coffin had been placed to await the funeral service which was to be held that afternoon.

"My brother came in several times and stood silently beside me. I felt that he was thinking he would now have clear sailing and could win my sweetheart, but I didn't think then that he was really glad I was dead. I couldn't believe that my own brother had reached that point in his hatred of me. But I was soon to know the worst.

"AT RONALD'S request the few neighbors who had gathered at the news of my death returned to their homes, and our old servant left the house to go to the village for supplies. Ronald gave her permission to stay until evening, as her daughter who lived there was ill. Then he seated himself in a room adjoining the parlor and everything became very quiet.

"God! how I prayed for power to move or to speak! Only a few hours remained before my burial would take place unless I could prevent it. After a time my brother came into the parlor again. As he did so, some one outside whistled sharply. The day was cool and stormy and the windows were closed. Ronald crossed the room, apparently to look out, and said, "Go around to the side door."

"The side door opened into a small vestibule, separated from the parlor by portières. I could distinctly hear all that was said in the vestibule. Ronald entered it and opened the door to admit the caller.

"As soon as the man spoke I knew him to be a laborer who had been helping us to clear land on our plantation. He was a rough specimen—part Indian, with a strong trace of negro blood. He had a brutal countenance and a silent furtive manner. I had disliked to have him around, but my brother had insisted on hiring him, as he was a good worker and strong as an ox. But at this time Ronald seemed impatient with the fellow.

" 'What do you want?' he asked gruffly.

" 'I jest wanted to tell you-all I done got that thing all fixed. He cain't miss it an'—'

" 'What are you telling me that for now?' my brother broke in angrily. 'Don't you know he's dead already?'

"There was a moment of stunned silence.

" 'Dead? You ain't foolin' me, be you, boss?'

" 'Of course not, you fool! He died yesterday very suddenly. We won't go into that matter any farther. You cover that thing up and go on with the other work. Be sure you keep your mouth shut, too.'

"The man cursed roundly.

" 'Keep my mouth shut, nothin'!' he snapped out. 'I done that 'ere dirty job fer you. I mighty nigh fell in afore I got done. Now I wants my money an' I wants it damn quick. I done writ my sister in Louisiany to git me a job an' I'd be in a Sat'd'y. If you don't pay me off I'll blow the hull doin's.'

"There was menace in his savage tone as well as in the words, and Ronald hastened to pacify him.

" 'Well, you go back to your cabin until after the funeral and I'll pay you in time for you to start to your sister's place tomorrow,' he answered bruskly.

"The sullen visitor departed and my brother came back into the parlor, muttering angrily under his breath. He paused and stood at my side. How I longed to rise and strike him down! I knew then that he was not only glad I was dead but was plotting to kill me when disease had laid me low and saved him from being my murderer. I could think of no reason for his treachery except that he was so determined to win my sweetheart for his wife that he was willing to take my life to accomplish it.

"As he turned to leave, his foot caught on one of the trestles that supported the coffin. It collapsed and fell to the floor with a crash. The coffin turned on its side and, as the lid hadn't been fastened in place, I rolled out and lay face downward on the floor.

"I think the shock must have broken the awful spell that bound me. At any rate I found I was able to move and could open my eyes. The devil of revenge rose within me. I resolved to make my resurrection as frightful to my brother as I could. He had an intense horror of the supernatural and I knew his guilty conscience would help to terrify him. I recalled, too, that he had been unable to get his life insured because the companies regarded him as too great a risk on account of a weak heart.

"He had deliberately planned to kill me; perhaps I could turn the tables on him. It was a wicked thought, and unworthy of me.

"Ronald stood as if thunderstruck for an instant. Though I couldn't see him, I knew the accident had unnerved him. But soon he slowly approached me. I waited until he stooped to roll me back into the coffin. Then I suddenly whirled over and threw

both arms around him. It was done so quickly and unexpectedly that he had no chance to escape or to recover his balance. He fell headlong, burying his face in my shoulder.

"He made frantic efforts to break my hold, but I gripped him like a vise. I was more muscular than he and my thirst for revenge gave me a fiendish strength, while his fright made him as weak as a child.

"After a brief struggle he raised his head and looked at me with eyes that bulged with terror. I could feel his heart pounding like a trip-hammer. His face was ghastly, gray and drawn. I kept my features rigid but had opened my eyes the merest trifle and I returned his gaze with a dull expressionless stare. As he looked at me all hope seemed to die within him. His head sank down, a convulsive tremor passed over him and he relaxed in my arms.

"I thought he had fainted, but when I rolled him to one side, felt his pulse and noted the sagging jaw and glazed eyes, I knew I had succeeded in paying him in his own coin. I had killed him and left no mark.

"MY FIRST sensation was one of triumph. He had planned to get rid of me but I had cheated the grave and beaten him at his own game. Then came a reaction and I did a very foolish thing. Though there was nothing to prove I had caused his death, yet the fact that I had meant to do it made me fear I would be suspected. 'A guilty conscience needs no accuser,' is a true saying. I became terror-stricken and determined that no one should know that any change had taken place, if I could prevent it.

"I rushed to the doors and locked them. For the first time in my life I was glad to be a twin and the image of my brother. Tearing off my shroud, I rolled his body into the coffin and spread the garment over it, then folded his hands on his breast and combed his hair. Fastening the lid down securely, I pushed the coffin close to the wall. I couldn't lift it back upon the trestles alone but I arranged everything else as it had been. Then I went to the buffet and took a a drink of cordial. I began to feel very weak and feared my paleness might cause comment.

"I had regained my composure and was able to act naturally when a neighbor called a little later. I casually asked him to help me place the coffin on the trestles. Knowing that we had no undertaker, there being none available in many thinly settled parts of the South, he thought nothing strange of the request.

"The funeral occurred as planned and my brother was buried. I assumed his name, and no one but my wife has ever known the truth until today.

"The next morning Ronald's accomplice showed me the trap he had been hired to prepare for me. There was an old quarry on our plantation, which had been abandoned years before. It had become a dangerous pitfall into which stock sometimes fell and were killed. During the rainy season the seep water in it was very deep. In fact, a hunter had fallen into it a few years before we bought the plantation, and although his companions made strenuous efforts to rescue him, he was drowned and his body was never recovered.

"I was very fond of trapping and had caught many animals in the vicinity of the quarry, having gone to attend my traps so often that I had broken a well-defined path through the underbrush. It was in this path that a snare had been prepared for me. The quarry extended underground for quite a distance beyond the pit itself, and beneath my path. It was at that point that an opening into it had been cunningly made and covered with the twigs and other debris with which the ground was

strewn, so that it was impossible to detect its presence. If I had stepped on the light trashy material that hid it, I should have broken through at once and been unable to save myself from falling to certain death at the bottom of the quarry. No one but the two conspirators would have ever known what became of me.

"The villain exhibited his work with pride, and after we had closed the opening to prevent accidents of the kind it was intended to cause, I paid the wretch the amount my brother had promised him, which I had found to be a tidy sum. He left the state and I've never seen him since.

"I sold the plantation and my wife and I went to Maryland. After a few years she died and I came to this place. I bought this corner of the cemetery, erected this building and have lived here ever since. I take care of these grounds for a reasonable stipend and the privilege of being let alone. I haven't had an attack of my malady for many years but I'm not taking any chances of being buried alive, for I've arranged to be my own undertaker."

The old man rose and lifted the curtain that divided the room. His act revealed a huge block of stone, which had been hollowed out in the shape of a coffin.

"You see I sleep in this," he went on, "and after I lie down I lower the lid, which you notice is suspended near the ceiling. It has a secret lock on the under side, which holds it against all comers. The opening left at the head isn't large enough to permit the removal of my body. The fastening of my door is entirely on the inside, so that when I draw in the cord no one can enter my home unless I wish, without breaking the door down, and that would be difficult.

"Even then my body cannot be taken out of this coffin, nor can the coffin itself be moved without expensive apparatus or the destruction of this building. I feel sure that no one will ever care to go to all that trouble for nothing. I have no relatives or friends and no hoarded wealth. It is seldom that any one comes to my door. Occasionally strangers stroll near, but after they get a glimpse of me they get away as fast as they can.

"You alone have shown a friendly interest or anything but repugnance. Most people act as if they think me a lunatic or some sort of a freak. Perhaps that isn't to be wondered at. I don't blame them for it. In fact I prefer it, for they have no desire to disturb me."

I rose, shook hands with my host and thanked him warmly for the entertainment he had afforded me.

"My friend," I said earnestly, "I envy you your security. You have gone to unusual lengths to protect yourself, and it surely seems that your plans must be successful. It is well worth the effort. I only wish that I was as well equipped to control the disposal of my body when I am through with it."

And thus we parted.

IT WAS several years later that, on a dreary autumn day, I stood again at the iron gate of that New England cemetery. The leaves of the magnificent trees that bordered the avenue were falling in showers, torn from their moorings by a boisterous southeast wind that chilled me to the bone. I felt unaccountably depressed as the gate closed behind me. Gazing about in that silent enclosure I knew that my hermit friend was either dead or unable to perform the task of caring for the grounds. While they were not really neglected, yet that exquisite neatness I had noticed on my former visit was absent.

I hurried to the stone building, but the lichen-covered doorstep and the grass-grown path that led to it were sufficient proof that the owner was

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Author of "Osiris" and "Mandrake"

EVEN the most discerning person might be excused for failing to trace the connection between the report of a police inspector to his chief regarding the disappearance of a desired criminal, and an article in the newspapers concerning the mysterious absence of a noted professor of mathematics. Yet the connection existed and has come to light only now through a few disjointed notes in the dairy of Dr. Maurice Carrington and a letter received by the chief of police of Orland, a city in northern California.

Properly, the history of the affair begins with Inspector Bowman's report to Chief Conrad, and is as follows:

Acting upon your instructions, I started a search for "Professor" Parkes, wanted for burglary, and learned that since about a week ago he has not been seen in any of his usual hangouts. Those who know his habits believe he has jumped the town. I learn that he has been keeping fairly straight since he was released from prison a year ago. No job can be traced to him in that time. I have several men on the lookout and hope to have news shortly.

To the police, the clever crook operating under the name of "Professor" Parkes had been unusually successful in his nefarious trade until apprehended and sent across for five years.

Emerging from his confinement, he had remained in seclusion, and the chief's desire to interview him had been with regard to another case concerning whch Parkes was supposed to possess information. Incidentally, the title "professor" was one to which Parkes had been entitled, as he had served on the faculty of a small university for a time as an assistant instructor in mathematics. But poor pay and small opportunity for advancement had evidently started him on a crooked course.

On the same day that Bowman sent his report to the chief, the following "story" appeared in the daily press of the city and was flashed over the wires of the news services. It was headed:

WHERE IS PROFESSOR CARRINGTON?

In part the article read as follows:

Where is Professor Maurice Carrington? The police would like to know, and also the public, following a fruitless effort to locate the missing scientist, whose house was partially destroyed by fire at 3 o'clock this morning. The blaze evidently originated in the study and laboratory of Dr. Carrington on the second floor of his Main Street resi-

dence. It is presumed that chemicals of a combustible nature may have exploded while he was at work on some experiment, for he was a chemist as well as mathematician of high standing. Or it may have been spontaneous combustion. The cause of the blaze and the fire itself sink into relative unimportance beside the fact that Carrington has vanished completely. He was not a victim of the fire, for no trace of human remains can be found in the debris of the second floor. Except for one servant, Carrington has lived alone for years. This man, William Dennel, almost as old as his employer, who is about sixty, was away last night at the home of a sick relative. When he returned early in the morning he could give no explanation of the affair.

It is believed that Carrington is without living relations, and both he and Dennel ate at a near-by restaurant. A domestic who came by the day cared for the house.

Dennel said in answer to questions by the police:

"I left the house at 6 o'clock last night. He [Carrington] never goes out at night and told me he intended working in his laboratory until late. He has no enemies that I know of. I have no idea where he can have gone."

It developed that Dennel had never been in this laboratory and study combined, Professor Carrington having absolutely forbidden anyone's entrance. The woman never cleaned there.

The house was searched from cellar to garret without a single trace being found of the missing man. The most startling feature developing from the search, however, is that every possible means of entrance from without or exit from within was barred, locked or otherwise fastened. The firemen had been obliged to break a plate-glass window to gain entrance when the fire was reported.

How, then, did Carrington leave the house—and where has he gone?

After the usual follow-up stories, containing nothing in the nature of an explanation of the disappearance, the public lost interest and the affair was relegated to the category of unsolved mysteries. The house was ordered closed pending the search for the scientist's will, which a firm of attorneys had drawn some years before and which it was believed might have been consumed in the fire.

Meantime, Chief Conrad had given up as fruitless the effort to locate "Professor" Parkes. And then, one day, came a letter which explained much of the Carrington mystery—explained, yet failed to explain. It was only when the tin dispatch box (hidden in a recess of the professor's study, hitherto undiscovered and untouched by the flames) was unearthed that the mystery surrounding both disappearances was in a measure cleared away and the gateway to the unknown opened—and closed.

THE box contained the missing will, which left most of the estate of Carrington to scientific bodies, and also a diary with random notes in the professor's crabbed chirography.

But first, the letter to the chief from Sydney Fox, formerly a close pal of "Professor" Parkes.

Dear Chief: I don't often take my pen in hand to write to a flycop, but I'm going straight now and haven't anything to be afraid of. I've done my bit and I'm as respectable as you, now. A pigeon was asking me about Parkes the other day but I wasn't able to tell him anything about my old pal. A few days later I got a letter from Parkes which he had left with a—well, never mind. It was written two days before that scientific bloke, Carrington, disappeared and his house burned. Well—this letter is too much for yours truly. I guess it won't do Parkes any harm, for as near as I can figure he and Carrington are both where not even a flycop can get 'em. Anyhow, here's the dope—and maybe you can get more out of it than I did, which I doubt.

Yours truly,

SYD FOX.

A somewhat bulky enclosure the chief, after reading, decided was the raving of a dope fiend, particularly as it was known that Parkes had occasionally used drugs. But when the diary in Carrington's dispatch box came to light, Conrad decided to submit the whole thing to the commissioners, who in turn handed it to the university, after which it became public property through the enterprize of an energetic reporter. So here it is. First a note from Parkes to Fox:

Dear Pal: I'm leaving this with Mrs. Burke to be delivered to you next time you go there. I'm not sure what is going to happen to me. If I don't show up within a reasonable length of time you can turn it all over to the police or anyone else.

THE following is the statement left by Parkes:

"I suppose if I were not educated or if my studies had not been along the line of mathematics I might put the experience I have had down as a mental hallucination. But, realizing, as I do, the possibilities that lie along the path of higher mathematics and allied sciences, and what a man with the learning of Dr. Maurice Carrington might accomplish, I am ready to believe that all that happened is not only possible, but that it happened to me. If the writing of this statement appears somewhat unusual, it may enlighten those who read, to know that I wrote it first *backward* and later copied it, so that it would read according to usual standards. Furthermore, I wrote it with my left hand, which was formerly my right. I am now hiding in Carrington's house. I shall leave it tonight, but *not* in the ordinary manner. Where I shall go, God alone knows. Now for the story:

"I have tried of late years to live straight. But recently I have discovered that the chances for an ex-con to gain a livelihood are most precarious. So I decided to try just one more coup and then strike out for the Antipodes. It must have been fate that sent me to the Carrington house. I knew him by reputation but had never seen him and had no idea where he lived. I had studied the place, saw that two old men were the only occupants, and when the one I took to be a servant left, apparently to be gone some time, since he had a valise, I determined to 'crack the crib', as they say in the vernacular. I waited till about 11 and the servant returned. It was pitch dark and there is no porch light. I kept out of sight, and as the servant opened the door and went in, I went also—like a shadow. I dodged into a recess of the hallway, where I remained till I heard both master and man retire. Meanwhile, from a few words of conversation, I discovered the identity of the man whose house I had entered and wished it had been someone else's. But it was now too late, so I figured on going ahead, but that if it came to a personal encounter with the professor I would under no circumstances injure a man for whom I had a great deal of respect.

"I judged his study would be a likely place to pick up some stuff of value—probably there would be a cash box or safe. I went up the stairs and succeeded in getting into the room. It was dark as a pocket, but I had no hesitation in using my flashlight because I knew they were both abed, and in another part of the building.

"It was a long room, with windows high up. The inner side was occupied by a sort of laboratory workbench with shelves for chemicals and instruments. At the near end of the room was a desk and bookcase and, as I had expected, a small safe. But it was open and contained nothing of value. There were some interesting scientific instruments, most of which were familiar to me, but little that seemed to offer negotiable spoil.

"One thing puzzled me. It was what I might call a window, or at least an aperture, about four feet square and the bottom about level with my knees. It was in the wall at the far end, which faced the street or yard.

"But it was not a window—nor a door. I find it hard to make my meaning clear. Imagine, if you can, an opening apparently to the open air, but veiled with some substance impervious alike to light and air, a substance unlike anything within ordinary knowledge. It was not cloth, nor was it wood, glass, or any similar com-

position. Yet it quivered and vibrated with every breath of air, as if its component parts were disconnected and in constant circulation, so to speak, as indeed all so-called 'matter' actually is. In color this veil, screen—whatever it might be termed—was grayish-blue, like the sky on a winter morning.

"I pressed my finger into the veil and it penetrated the entire length of the member, as if there had been no limit to the depth or thickness of the obstacle between the study and the outer air.

"When I removed my finger, there was no visible orifice. I puzzled over the queer matter until I recalled my real purpose here and finally selected a few valuable small instruments (much as I disliked doing so) and laid them aside to take along. Then, drawn by a curiosity over which I seemed to have no control, I again turned to the mysterious aperture. I threw again the light from my pocket lamp upon the surface, which oscillated and wavered like the surface of a pond disturbed by a vagrant breeze. Yet it gave the impression of tremendous activity and vitality, as if, odd though it sounds, it were the seat of all motion. I know how ineffectual must be my attempt to make this clear, and all my similes are lame. Yet there are no words to tell just how this affected me.

"Some attraction kept me there, induced me to place first a tentative finger, then my arm through, or rather, into the veil. I followed with one foot — in another moment I had slipped through!

"IF I have had difficulty in expressing myself heretofore, what must be my dilemma now, when I attempt to describe what followed. After all, our vocabulary is wofully limited when it comes to the consideration of matters outside the ken of common knowledge and average minds. I had, so it seemed, entered a void, though all about me was that impression, real or imaginary, of tremendous vitality and activity. I seemed to have gained an unwonted lightness, as if I had become a part of this great external and internal commotion. Also, I seemed to possess, at least to feel the possession of, superior power, as yet untested. I sensed rather than felt things, but instinctively I knew I had blundered into some strange state of existence, but that I was there *too soon*. I stretched my wings, metaphorically, like the fledgeling bird when its pinions are first given to the air. I felt the limitless, vast and untried reaches of my new world all about me and time had assumed new standards, if not altogether annihilated. I realized that, already, since my plunge into the unknown, I had lived centuries. They say hasheesh eaters sometimes experience these sensations —I do not know; that is one drug I have never tried.

"Then, as my perceptions became a trifle clearer, though as yet far from clear, I saw dimly, almost introspectively, if that is comprehensible, a great plain bordered by colorless skies, across which rolled great, vaporous clouds.

"Suddenly I was aware of sounds, many and indeterminate; sounds that came from nowhere and died away into nothingness. Now they rose to a babble of what might have been voices, though no words were distinguishable; again they were but subdued moans, sounding the very depths of anguish and despair.

"I moved forward, and vistas changed as if by magic. I realized that with one brief step I had covered inestimable space and that eons of time had passed me by. The landscape, if I may call it such when there was no land, became a vivid green with a sky of gold. Another step forward, and dull, overpowering blackness enveloped me. It was as if I had

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LIFE in the West African bush can be either wildly exciting or deadly monotonous. Jim Chisholm had complained to his friend Hodgins the first night he arrived down in Duala from his lonely bush station in northern Nigeria that his tour had been the latter.

"Not even a damned uprising. Natives all as peaceful as lambs," he grumbled, "so I thought I'd get in a little shooting before I went home and trekked down here. I've heard so many of your wonderful yarns about this being the finest hunting ground in the world."

He grinned over at his host, who was noted for his yarning.

"Have any luck?" Hodgins asked.

Chisholm puffed away at his cigarette for a moment and stared moodily out into the depths of the African night but did not answer for some time.

"I had a rather exciting trip," he began at length, with a wry little smile, "but I didn't get a shot. To tell the truth, I had an idea I was being hunted myself."

"What do you mean?"

Hodgins pulled himself up sharply from the depths of his camp chair and looked curiously over at his guest.

"Well, as I told you, I started down country with the intention of doing some hunting. I had the usual string of carriers and my boy Adamou (you remember him, don't you?), but say! we had no sooner crossed the French border into the Cameroons than the fun commenced. The first night we camped at Nsanakang, in an old native hut just along the Tie Tie Bridge—you know the old spot where we met the Huns in 1916. Just as I was turning in for the night a native suddenly came slinking in out of the darkness, naked as the day he was born and carrying a note, wedged in a cleft stick, proper native style. He squatted down on the floor while I took and read it. It was a warning, telling me to turn back and not attempt to cross the Cameroons, and was signed with—what do you think?—the Leopard's claw, roughly sketched in blood!"

Hodgins whistled in dismay.

"Got the Leopard Society on your trail, eh?"

Chisholm nodded.

"So I concluded. The note was written in good English, native clerk style, but when I demanded to know from the carrier who had sent him he pretended not to know English.

Hausa or Yoruba. But I know the native too well. My ten years here haven't left me altogether a fool, Hodgy. I had seen at the first glance that my friend was no bushman. He had the dark ridge around his neck, showing he had been used to wearing a collar, and the soles of his feet were pink and torn—he was used to boots. And when he whined, I saw a gold filling in his tooth! So I threatened to thrash him, and that soon brought the English out of him. However, he insisted he did not know who had sent him. He said he had met a man on the bush trail, who had paid him to deliver the note; and when I asked him why he was posing as a bushman he excused himself by saying the man asked him to deliver the note that way. Well, I couldn't get anything out of him, so I had the carriers come in and tie the chap up, intending to hand him over to the police at the next station, along with the note. But the next morning he was gone! And the carriers, of course, knew nothing.

"Poor old Adamou was terribly concerned and begged me to turn back, but I was out for the adventure of the thing, so I went on. You know that country through there, between Nsanakang and Ossidinge—bush so dense that we didn't see sunlight all day, and steaming like an oven. We heard several herds of elephant trumpeting but didn't see any and arrived at Ossidinge that next night. I put up with Dupré, the agent of the factory there. He was mighty pleased to see me, too, and opened a case of Plymouth gin in honor of the occasion. We had quite a merry evening. I told him about the note, and he seemed to get quite upset over it. He said that the whole country was a hotbed of the Leopards: natives disappearing every night, mangled bodies being found in the morning, and the government too damned frightened to tackle it. There are too many influential men in it. The only man who had courage enough to tackle it or start ferreting was poor old Cheveneaux of the police. It seems he got a long list of names of members, including a number of his own officials, his clerk and house boy. But before he had a chance to act he was found mauled himself one morning. Since then the police have steered clear of the thing.

"Dupré asked me if I had any enemies, but for the life of me I couldn't think of a soul who had any grudge against me. Dupré warned me not to go on through the bush, but I said I was so far in then that there wasn't much use turning back. Well, we talked late on into the night. I guess it was about two when we turned in. I was dead tired and asleep within five minutes. His bungalow is one of those modern, corrugated iron-roofed ones, with grass mats hung inside as ceilings—and hot as the blazes. Perhaps it was th. heat—I don't know what it was—but suddenly I found myself wide awake, listening to something rustling along overhead on the mat ceiling. I thought it might be a black *mamba*, at first (you know how they often creep in there), so I slid noiselessly out from under the mosquito net, with my revolver in my hand, and turned up the hurricane lamp. And just in time to see a streak of silver flash through the air! Then the mats bulged violently and suddenly and I knew it was no snake up there. I got off three rounds, but evidently I missed, for the next moment I heard someone jump on to the lower roof next door and heard bare feet padding away. Then Dupré and the boys rushed in. We both had rather a shock when we saw that a broad, flat-bladed knife was buried into the hilt, right in my pillow where a moment before my head had been. And so accurately had the weapon been thrown that the rent in the mosquito net was barely perceptible."

"Good Lord!" Hodgins exclaimed.

"Yes, and when we examined the thing we found the Leopard's claw scratched on it. Dupré was in an awful funk about it and I confess that I felt a bit the same way myself. I knew then that the beggars meant business, and I knew more so the next morning. Dupré and I spent the rest of the night over whiskies and sodas, but just at sunrise his house boys came rushing in to say that poor old Adamou's body had just been found outside the compound, mauled by some ferocious beast, covered with blood and bits of yellow fur, and the entrails missing."

Chisholm's voice broke for a moment.

"Poor old Adamou! He had been a faithful old scout. I felt wild about it and Dupré was wilder. He insisted that I seek police protection, but my fighting blood was up. The Leopards were on my trail; but why? I racked my brain to think of anyone I had ever offended, but even yet I can think of nobody, unless it was something that happened in the war that I have forgotten. Anyhow, I made up my mind to see the thing through, and so I started off again that same day with a new boy that Dupré hunted out for me."

"Then?" Hodgins demanded eagerly, as Chisholm ceased abruptly.

"Nothing! That was all there was to it. Evidently I had just struck the belt. They made it hot for me, but I came on the rest of the way and no one molested me, though I confess I didn't sleep much and I didn't delay to do any hunting."

FOR the next hour or so the two men sat discussing this strange adventure, till Hodgins suddenly leaned nearer and said in a low tone: "I suppose you are not looking for any more excitement?"

In an instant Chisholm was all attention, but before his host proceeded he rose silently and stepped outside. The next moment there was an oath, then a cry.

"What are you doing out here?" Hodgins shouted irritably and lugged his house boy to where the ray of light lit up his black face.

"I wait here to see if the master call for more drinks," the boy whined.

"You lie. You were listening! Now get off! If I want you I'll call you," Hodgins said as he shoved him off into the darkness.

"I knew someone was hanging around listening," he went on with a grin as he came back to his chair, "but I guess he was interested in you. Niya always remembers you since the war. He was quite excited when your letter came saying you were coming. Well—"

He settled himself close to Chisholm and went on with his story.

"I've struck a bit of luck!" he remarked in a mysterious undertone.

"Yes?" His friend's tone was cautious. Ten years on the Coast leaves a man rather cautious with "luck" stories. "What is it this time? A gold mine?"

"No!" Hodgins quite ignored the irony. "Not a mine but something better. Gold specie! The stuff itself! I know where there is a pile of it!"

"Native yarns, Hodgy?"

"Yes, native yarns if you like, but perfectly sound this time," Hodgins answered stoutly. "You went all through the Cameroon campaign, didn't you? And you were here in Duala when it was captured and the Huns evacuated. Now, didn't it ever strike you queer that although Duala was the headquarters of the German treasury, there was never any gold specie found there? Yet it is a known fact they could not have taken it away with them."

Chisholm did remember, for it had been a much-discussed subject at the time, but now he said warily, "Yes, but wasn't it assumed the Germans

managed to smuggle it up country somehow?"

"They didn't, though!" Hodgins said with a grin.

"They didn't?"

"No! You remember when the Huns knew they would have to evacuate they thought there might be a chance of their escaping out to sea on some of those old cargo boats that were lying here in the harbor. They actually started out in them, too, then got caught like rats in a trap, for the *H. M. S. Cumberland* came in and shelled them all as they were trying to steam out. Now I happen to know that the Huns had piled all their gold specie—five hundred thousand gold marks—in boxes, and had put them aboard the old cargo *Bolango*. When the *Cumberland* began firing, they immediately put the boxes back into a surf boat and sent it ashore again in charge of three Hun officers. It was never seen again, nor those men."

Chisholm was more than interested now.

"But I happen to know what became of it," Hodgins went on eagerly. "I've got an old native here who knows all about it and knows where those officers hid it. Mika Dodawa is his name. He's been a trader here for years, and he had quite a business before the war. He was one of the first to be taken prisoner when the Huns came in here, because he was a British subject. Originally he came from Nigeria. He was a clever old chap, speaks good English, and I suppose they thought he was a spy. Anyhow, they commandeered all his goods and made him do carrier work. When the fun began he was detailed off to help load the *Bolango*. He was on her when the shelling began and, by a stroke of luck, he was the one native sent along to help those three Hun officers hide the gold. They went in the surf boat up one of the creeks here, landed the gold and buried it. Then the four of them waited till dark and put off again, intending to sail down the creek, slip past the *Cumberland* out to open sea, and try to escape down to Fernando Po. They planned to keep old Mika along with them till nearing the island, and then throw him overboard so he could tell no tales about the gold; but fortunately Mika speaks German as well as English, and he knew all they were saying. However, as they were stealing down the creek a shell suddenly came whizzing along. The Huns' white caps had given them away. Mika didn't wait for the next. He threw himself overboard and swam ashore just in time, for the second shell cut the canoe right in two and the others were lost. He found he had landed in dense bush. He was afraid to go back to Duala, not knowing who were in possession there, so he wandered around; and the next day he fell in with a party of German runners going up country. He was at once commandeered for service again, and before long found himself away up in Nigeria. He didn't get back here till after the armistice. Then, of course, all his trade was gone."

"But does he still keep his secret?"

"Yes, but since his terrible adventures he has naturally steered clear of anything that might get him mixed up with the government. The old chap likes me and owes me a little. I advanced him enough to open up a new agency—of course it will be to my own benefit, too, for he is a shrewd trader. But out of gratitude he has let me in on the secret."

"You don't mean—?"

"Yes, the old chap told me the whole yarn today. And he has offered to sell the secret. He wants five hundred pounds!"

Chisholm looked rather dubious.

"Are you sure the man's straight?"

"I'd stake my life on him! Of course he expects to make his pile out of it, too, but he's too old to attempt the thing himself, and besides, he

doesn't trust his own people. One third the loot and the five hundred pounds, that is what he asks. Now what do you say?"

"I'm on!" Chisholm said promptly, "if only for the fun of the thing."

2

EARLY the next morning they started off to clinch the bargain with the old native.

Mika Dodawa had already established a flourishing business on the money lent him by Hodgins. Chisholm noted this and commented on it as they made their way down the marine to where a large new sign,

MIKA DODAWA
General Negociant

was displayed over a pretentious whitewashed building.

"Evidently prospering," Hodgins remarked. "Come on! We'll go right in!"

Mika's store was a typical coast one: perfume, soaps, cotton goods, sardines, silks, cheap fancy biscuits, hurricane lamps, all cluttered up in a heterogeneous mass.

Mika himself was in behind the counter. He was a little, thin, shrewd-faced man, not too dark, and with Semitic features. His manners were markedly French, bordering on the suave. He wore English clothes and the usual dirty collar and cuffs.

He bowed low as they entered, evidently taking them for customers, but the next instant a look of pleased bewilderment crossed his face. He slid out from behind the counter and came toward them, hand outstretched.

"It's not you, Mr. Hodgins, surely?" he cried, in the most perfect English Chisholm had ever heard a native use. (He learned later that the old man had been educated in England and spoke French and German just as fluently.)

"God is merciful!" he went on, his voice trembling with eagerness. "I have waited long for this day. See how, by your goodness, I have prospered! The money you lent me has already increased a hundredfold! But come."

He led the way into a little back room and ordered the native clerk who had been sitting in there to go forward and tend the shop. Then he made haste with his own hands to pour them out a whisky and soda.

"I did not know you were coming. I had almost given up hope," he said; then glancing at Chisholm significantly, he added, "though that little matter of which I spoke to you yesterday still remains hidden within my bosom."

"My friend here knows all about it," Hodgins put in hastily. "I could not raise the five hundred by myself and, as you suggested, I asked my friend to come in with us on it."

"Of course!" The old man's eyes narrowed slightly. "But I presume our original agreement still holds good?"

"Yes," Hodgins said a little impatiently. "You get one-third the loot and another five hundred pounds down."

"Cash down!" he put in eagerly.

They had already anticipated this and had the cash ready. Hodgins took off his web belt and counted out a roll of crisp notes. The old man watched with glistening eyes. He clutched at them with trembling fingers when they were passed to him, and shoved them far down into his breast pocket.

"And the receipt?" asked Chisholm carelessly.

"Oh!" said the old man in surprize. "You understand the necessity of caution, sir. With the French government here it would be so easy to arouse suspicion, and if any writing should fall into their hands they would ferret it out to the end."

"That's all right," Chisholm said easily, "the French government won't

get hold of any of my papers. I want the receipt; otherwise I back out. What if there should be no loot? I want my money refunded."

"Of course! Of course!" Mika said soothingly, and at once turned and wrote out a receipt for the money, adding at Chisholm's dictation: "To be refunded in the event of the failure of the venture."

He was smiling as he handed the paper over, then said, in a business-like tone, "Now, when can you gentlemen start?"

"Today!" they both said promptly.

"Good!"

Old Mika came closer to them and went on in a whisper, "I will send my boy to lead you to the canoe at noon. The spot lies three hours' journey up the creek and you will know it thus. You will pass three villages on the right, hidden back in the mangroves; and four miles beyond the last village you will come to a great swamp, three miles in length and bare of trees or shrubs. Beyond that lies a dense bush where you will see, rising high above all others, a great white cottonwood tree. You cannot mistake it. I dare not go along with you, as they know an old man does not go shooting with the white men. Take your guns, and the officials will think you go but for a day's sport. Wait for me under the cottonwood tree and I will come when darkness falls, with tools and trusty canoemen."

The two men readily agreed to the plan and were relieved to know everything was in readiness for them. Accordingly, they returned to their bungalow, changed into bush kit and started out after old Mika's boy when he arrived an hour or so later.

"You no take me 'long to shoot," Niya said in deep chagrin, as he saw the two men start off.

There was a peculiar gleam in his dark eyes as he spoke—a rather challenging one at the strange boy who was usurping his place.

"Not this time," Hodgins said.

"You no go for Dead Creek. Him be bad place for white man go shoot!" he called out anxiously. "No be good bird there and plenty fever!"

But the two men went on without heeding.

"How did the beggar know we were going up Dead Creek? I didn't know myself," Hodgins said suddenly. "But perhaps this boy was talking to him." And he promptly forgot the incident.

AN HOUR later, in bush kit again, they found themselves sailing down the creek, well supplied with food and drinks provided from Mika Dodawa's store.

The creek was one of those isolated backwaters that surround Duala, one of the least attractive, too—a veritable cesspool for odors, a gray, stinking stretch of ugliness, infested with crocodiles. Dense, low, impenetrable mangroves lined either bank. Beyond the three villages no signs of habitation were visible, although so near the sea. Long before they reached the great, sinister-looking swamp. they saw the cottonwood tree, standing like a gaunt, bare skeleton, arms outstretched against the sky. The bush ended abruptly again some little distance beyond, running off into swamp. It was, as the men then surmised, in reality a small island, surrounded on three sides by snake-infested swamp, and on the fourth by a swiftly rushing river. Certainly a choice spot on which to hide treasure.

They alighted and sent the canoe off as Mika had directed, then proceeded inland along a fairly well-worn but well-concealed path, till they were under the cottonwood tree. The rest of the day they dozed and smoked, amused themselves watching

the little gray-faced monkeys mocking them from the trees and the egrets flashing like streaks of silver in through the green, and listening to the myriads of parrots screaming at each other. The day was long, for they were both suffering from the excitement that precedes the fulfilment of a great quest.

It did not get dark till 8 o'clock, and by that time they were both chilled to the bone. Heavy, foul mists were creeping up from the swamps and a chill breeze was sweeping in from the sea.

"Hope he'll come soon!" Hodgins said, as a blood-curdling roar of a leopard rolled through the bush. "That's too near to be pleasant!"

"And we dare not even light a fire!" Chisholm shivered.

The next moment they were relieved to hear the soft dip of paddles, the abrupt grating of a canoe running up on the sand, then low, hushed voices. They hurried out to the water's edge.

"That you, Mika?" Hodgins called out.

"Yes, sir!"

In the gloom they could just discern the old man's figure standing on the bank. Another dark and naked one was removing tools from the canoe and placing them upon the ground. Mika gave hurried orders in some native tongue and the canoemen paddled off silently into the darkness.

Mika turned, handed them each a spade, and led the way off through the bush, remarking, "We must hurry! We have a good night's work ahead of us!"

He led on past the cottonwood tree into dense bush. There was no path now. They were pushing through bushes and thorns that under ordinary circumstances would have brought forth more than one oath, but in their excitement they felt nothing. Suddenly the cry of a leopard rolled again through the bush, this time even closer than before.

"I hope you brought your guns!" Mika said rather nervously. "This bush, being uninhabited, is the choice haunt of many beasts of prey!"

"We're all right," Hodgins said confidently.

"Ah! Here we are!" Mika exclaimed.

He lit a match and held it up to the trunk of a palm. The two men just barely caught a glimpse of some rough mark on it, when the light flickered out.

"Yes, here we are!" Mika said in a voice trembling with eagerness. "Now, after four long years, I am about to see the fulfilment of my desire. Beneath you, gentlemen, some four feet down, lies the treasure!"

They commenced digging at once. It was a strange scene: the velvety blackness of the tropical night, the still denser gloom of the great forest around them, the three dark figures bent low over their spades. They spoke little, but old Mika stopped often to rest.

They had made a pit some three feet deep when Chisholm suddenly heard a muffled cry. He looked up in alarm, but for the moment could discern nothing distinctly. Then gradually he made out the outline of a monstrous, ferocious-looking animal, standing erect, pawing in the air. He saw Hodgins pitch forward heavily into the pit—saw old Mika scrambling away on all fours toward the bush.

Instinctively he felt for his revolver. Then he was conscious of a terrific blow on the back of his head. He knew no more.

3

WHEN he awoke he could remember nothing at first. He felt faint and weak. His eyes smarted. His head swam and felt too big for his body. He was conscious of a

strangely repressed feeling. The air seemed filled with great yellow and black spots. Then things began to clear.

He discovered that he was bound tightly to a pillar. Thick strands of fiber were wound around his body, pinioning his arms close to his sides. Another lot bound his legs and ankles.

He looked dazedly around him. He was in a huge circular building, the like of which he had never before seen in all his wanderings in Africa. It was evidently a temple of some kind. Massive leopard skins covered the entire walls and ceiling, which was tent-shaped and held up by two highly-polished mahogany tree trunks. The floor was also covered with skins. Great ivory tusks, perfect in form and color, ribbed the walls at intervals. and at the base of each flickered small oil lights, casting strange shadows around the room. On one side a great leopard skin swayed softly in the wind, and Chisholm surmised that this was the door, but there appeared to be no other opening. Opposite him was a clay fireplace on which smoked and sputtered a small flame. Beside this, on a pile of skins, a grotesque, black, naked figure squatted. He might have been a statue, so inhumanly ugly and immovable he sat. The whites of his eyes gleamed out startlingly, diabolically. As he saw Chisholm staring, his mouth leered open, revealing two long, hideous white fangs in an otherwise toothless cavern. He leaned forward, and monotonously, rhythmically, began to beat a tom-tom. Then he began a weird, nasal chant.

"Ar—i—ana—dum! dum! dum! —ar—dum! dum!"

It nauseated Chisholm. He looked wildly about him; then his gaze fell upon Hodgins, only a yard or so away, tied to another polished pillar, and still unconscious. Hodgins' head hung limply to one side, his bare body (for he was stripped to the waist) covered with mud and blood.

After a time (an eternity it seemed to Chisholm) Hodgins stirred and opened his eyes, but for a moment he acted as dazed as Chisholm had acted.

Finally he seemed to recognize Chisholm. He gave a sickly grin.

"The real thing this time!" he muttered hoarsely.

"And no chance of escape!" Chisholm added gloomily.

The old devil in the corner had ceased thumping his drum as they commenced talking, and he now rose and crept from the room. Outside they heard again the weird leopard cry, but now they understood.

"Old Two Fang's giving the signal!" Hodgins said grimly.

THERE was a confused, suppressed murmur at the door, as from a gathering mob. Then the great leopard skin was lifted and a long line of the most terrifying creatures they had ever beheld entered in single file.

Their black bodies were naked except for a massive leopard skin fastened across the chest and over the right shoulder. Over their heads and foreheads, too, were fastened the upper portion of leopard's heads, the ears standing stiffly erect, the bushy eyebrows hanging heavy over their gleaming bloodshot eyes. On their hands, fastened in an ingenious manner, were leopard's claws, dripping with blood as if fresh from an orgy.

Old Two Fang stood at the door, monotonously thumping his drum as they filed in, silent as ghosts. There were more than fifty of them. The room seemed overflowing as they all squatted in a semi-circle around their two victims. The room was stiflingly hot and reeked of perspiration, a peculiar incense and (but perhaps this was only fancy) warm blood.

After they were all seated, the tallest Leopard, who had entered first and was evidently their leader, stepped out in front of the two white men. He raised his hand and the tom-tom ceased. The room was deathly still. A hundred yellow-fringed, dark, savage eyes glared at the two victims. Old Two Fang moved silently forward with a large Yoruba stool, plated with gold. He placed this in front of the leader. Next he brought forward a great golden goblet and placed it upon the stool; then with a low salaam he backed away to the door.

If a real leopard had suddenly opened its mouth and spoken, neither Chisholm nor Hodgins could have been more surprized than when, the next moment, the great savage before them began in flawless English: "Gentlemen, I suppose you are wondering why you are thus honored?"

Neither of them attempted to answer, but both were conscious of a sickly feeling, such as a fly must experience as it watches a spider creep nearer and nearer, playfully sidestepping as it comes.

He laughed, then went on lightly: "You are about to participate in the noblest, the most wonderful rite the world has ever known. You are to be highly honored. Your blood is to be mingled with that of many martyrs who have been chosen to lay the foundation for the great new African Empire. You are now in the hands of the noble Leopard Society, which is gradually reaching out its tentacles over the whole world. Wherever the despised black man has been ground down under the tyrannical heel of the white, there are we. We are the worshipers of blood. We live by blood. Why? Because blood is life, brains, power! On blood has every empire of the world been built! France, Russia, England, America, and now, last and greatest of all, Africa, which will soon dominate the world! The white man shows us the way. We have profited by his mistakes. Our lands, our slaves, were wrested from us in blood. Now we claim them back. And for every inch of soil taken, for every drop of blood shed, every blow, every insult, every sneer, we take payment—*in blood!*"

"You forget," Chisholm said quietly, "what is the policy of the British government. For every white man's life ruthlessly taken, England demands the lives of a whole village!"

The native clenched his fists then, and lost his smooth manner. Turning toward his satellites he broke out into what seemed a torrent of abuse toward the prisoners. A low, ominous growl answered his remarks, and they moved as if eager to spring up, but in a moment the leader had cooled down again and turned, smiling.

"Do not trouble, my friends. England cannot punish what she does not know. Two lonely men go off into the bush, hunting or—what was it?—prospecting for tin! They disappear! Where? Ah! There are a million swamps, rushing rivers, quicksands, which they may have inadvertently fallen into! They may perchance have fallen prey to the wild beasts of the forest—leopards, for instance. Anyhow, they are gone. England will send out a scout or two, but she has no time to search the great bush. They are gone. Alas! The government will wire home condolences—then will forget!"

His mocking words were only too true, as both men realized. They did not attempt to answer.

"Do not grieve, my dear sirs," he went on. "You came to seek gold; instead, you are chosen to be a sacrifice to the Leopard god, the god by whose power the new and emancipated nation of Africa shall arise. What greater honor could you wish than to join the 'noble army of mar-

tyrs' you sing about? Ah, yes, my friends! You see I know your estimable Christian hymns. Do I not sing them every Sunday in the mission church?"

"But why choose us?" Hodgins put in thickly.

"Why? Ah, my friend, *you* were chosen because you were foolish enough to offend the great high priest of the Leopard Society. Your friend here was in reality the chosen victim. He persisted in coming on to us, although warned by the way. Then we knew that indeed our god must desire his blood. As for you, well, if you consort with fools you must share their fate. And a double sacrifice is always acceptable."

"You lie!" Chisholm said hotly. "I never harmed anyone in your damned society."

But a grotesque, wrinkled old brown figure had suddenly arisen from the ground and now came forward, pointing a long, skinny finger toward them accusingly.

"No?" he jeered. "You did not know that I was a high priest of the Leopard Society. I was simply poor old Mika Dodawa, the trader. Ha, ha! And you paid me five hundred pounds to bring you to your punishment. You never wronged me, eh?"

His voice, trembling with rage, now rose shrilly.

"No? You don't remember Mika Dodawa, perhaps. But you do remember Yosadmu, the German spy, whom you captured here in 1916 and had shot, when you and your damned troops marched in here. Well, he was my son! And since then I have been waiting—waiting!"

Chisholm stared incredulously. He remembered distinctly Yosadmu, one of the trickiest of spies, who had served the Allies and Huns in turn and whose death had been a good riddance to all.

"Yes, your blood will taste sweet to me!" the old man went on gloatingly. "Clever white man, who calls us monkey and bushman! Now we shall see what your blood and brains look like, if they are any different from ours after all!"

He was clawing now in front of them with his sharp old talons as if to rip their eyes out, but at a word from the leader he quieted down. The leader then, from the inside of his leopard skin, drew out, to the amazement of the captives, a surgeon's scalpel. A look of satisfaction crossed his face as he saw their amazement.

"Yes!" he said, answering their unspoken question, and giving a hideous grin. "It is a surgeon's scalpel. Very latest design. From New York. You see we work scientifically, as our lords, the white men, have taught us. Do not fear I shall be clumsy or bungling in the operation. I was supposed to be a fairly clever surgeon, the best of my year in London University College. You may even have heard of me—Dr. Joseph Brown, one time house surgeon assistant at St. Bart's, London, at present assistant surgeon of the Duala government hospital. Otherwise, Olowole Dodi, chief of the Leopard Society!"

They watched him with horror-filled eyes as he stepped nearer. In a most professional manner he took a piece of charcoal from his secret pocket and marked a long straight line across the lower chest of each of the prisoners.

"This is the spot!" he said casually. "The pancreas. We really do not ask much, do we?"

He lifted up the golden goblet. Chisholm saw him approach, saw the glitter of the scalpel, but it was his ear he touched. He was conscious of a sharp pain, like the prick of a needle. He could hear the drip, drip of blood falling into the goblet. He saw the chief move off toward Hodg-

ins—he was feeling faint—he closed his eyes. When he opened them a minute later, the Leopard was standing holding the goblet high above his head and was calling out what seemed to be a battle cry. Then he drained the cup dry.

In an instant the mob was on its feet, clawing, pushing, roaring, savage, intoxicated with the lust for blood. Old Two Fang at the door beat his tom-tom violently. The room was in an uproar. Dancing, swaying, chanting, they swept round and round, growing madder every minute, till the leader suddenly called a halt. They lined up in order then, and swaying, undulating, they passed out through the door. The chief was last, and as he went he bowed low.

"One hour, gentlemen, to confess your sins and send any messages home to England—which, of course, will not be sent!"

A WAVE of fresh air had swept in under the door skin as it was lifted, reviving them somewhat. Chisholm and Hodgins looked at each other. Both were ghastly pale, both with dripping ear-lobes! They did not attempt to speak, for both felt the hopelessness of the situation.

Outside the door, old Two Fang continued his monotonous drumming. It seemed to be hammering against their brains. Farther off, now louder, now fainter, came the weird, passionate chant of the Leopards, evidently working themselves up into a frenzy for the culminating sacrifice.

Chisholm was gazing critically now at Hodgins' bindings. Suddenly he began straining wildly, frantically at his own. He felt something give a little around his ankles and redoubled his efforts. But he was weak from the blow and loss of blood, and after a time he had to desist.

Hodgins had been watching the struggle eagerly. "Try again, Chisholm," he said. "You've loosened your ankles a little!"

Chisholm strained at his legs again, and this time he found he could move his feet freely, but, try as he would, the rope became no looser.

"No use!" he muttered. "It won't come any looser!"

He let his head sink upon his chest and stared moodily down at his heavy marching boots. He was trying to realize that death was near, but only silly, trivial thoughts would come, little fragments of happy days, a bit of the Strand, a lunch at Simpson's; those boots, the day he had bought them in Bond Street—nine pounds he had paid for them and when he had demurred the clerk, a funny dapper little man, had said, "They will last you a lifetime, sir";—and now—

The shrieks and wails of the Leopards were rising still higher. Chisholm gave a sickly grin over at his companion. But Hodgins was staring as if mesmerized, at something on the floor. Chisholm's eyes followed.

A dark, wooly head was slowly, painfully pushing through an incredibly narrow aperture between the skins and the floor; then came the long, paint-smeared body, absolutely devoid of covering, stopping, listening every moment, bloodshot eyes fixed fearfully on the door as if expecting every moment to see someone rush in.

The two victims watched, half fearfully, half hopefully. Then both gave a gasp of astonishment as finally, fully in, the native shot to his feet and darted toward them.

"Niya!" Hodgins said feebly, for in spite of the grotesque disguise he at once recognized the boy who had served him so long. But the boy did not pause or even look at them. He seized the bloody scalpel which still lay on the stool and began deftly, quickly, slashing at their bindings. It was only when the two men both stood free that he spoke.

"I save you, massa! I be Leopard but I no harm you! I tell you it no be good to come for here. I send Mr. Chisholm here a note all way up country to tell him no come for here but—"

He ceased abruptly and looked around in terror. Outside the frenzied wails had suddenly ceased and an ominous silence descended.

"They come, massa, one time!" Niya whispered frantically, and even as he spoke the great Leopard skin moved slightly. As quick as lightning the boy leaped across and took up a position alongside the door. The next moment old Two Fang crept silently in. As he glanced over at the pillars and saw the two victims standing free, he let his tom-tom fall to the ground and opened his mouth to yell. The next moment a blow from behind sent him reeling to the floor.

Then Niya bent, lifted a corner of the great skin, and peeped out.

"No good, massa!" he called out excitedly; "they come one time!"

His bloodshot eyes roamed wildly around the room, up at the great domed ceiling, down at the tiny aperture through which he had crawled, then over at the tiny fireplace.

Outside, a solemn, weird chanting had begun, accompanied by slow, measured beats on the tom-tom, coming closer and closer each moment.

Hodgins and Chisholm looked at each other. Fate was surely playing strange tricks to bring release but not escape. But Niya was frantically tearing the great skins down from the wall. Then he turned and threw them toward the white men, and at once they understood his plan. In a moment they were decked up quite as fantastically as any Leopard, the dirt and blood effectually carrying out the disguise of their faces. Then Niya ran to the fireplace, pulled out a handful of dried grass from the roof and set it alight. In an instant the whole place was a blinding, suffocating mass of smoke. That was the last they ever saw of the boy.

Chisholm felt Hodgins grasp his hand, and together they made a dash for the door. A lurid red flame shot up, accompanied by a terrified wail and a savage roar from the frenzied crowd outside. Then a group of them burst in to save the gold and ivory, but in the general confusion it was easy enough for the two white men to dash out.

The air outside was dense with smoke. The old dried timbers of the temple were shooting off like rockets. The crowd of Leopards was rocking, swaying, wailing like madmen, the glare from the flames making them appear more diabolical than ever. But Hodgins and Chisholm were not waiting to see spectacular sights. Hand in hand they fled, like two hunted animals, till they reached the kindly bush, nor did they stop till they could no longer see the red glare on the trees, nor hear the blood-curdling wails of the Leopards.

For the rest of the night they wandered on, waiting wearily for daylight. Then, just as the first, faint gray light began to steal down through the trees, they stumbled upon a fresh horror. They found themselves in a large circular clearing, walled in by a solid rampart of great ivory tusks. In the center was an altar, also built of tusks, and on this lay the mangled, bloody form of a native. Masses of blood-stained yellow fur lay all around.

Shuddering, they stumbled out and crept back into the bush again. Then suddenly they found themselves at the river's edge. Chisholm pushed through the mangroves and looked downstream to see if there was any chance of escape. But he turned quickly and crouched low.

"Hide, Hodgy, hide! Here they come," he whispered, and Hodgins ducked down beside him.

The next moment a long line of canoes glided swiftly by. They were manned by dull, naked canoemen and a crowd of natives, some wearing English clothes. In one, immaculately dressed and looking decidedly handsome and respectable, was Dr. Joseph Brown. Beside him, suave and dapper as ever, was Mika Dodawa! They appeared to be having an interesting conversation.

Long after the Leopards had passed, the two white men still crouched low in the bushes, fearful lest other Leopards might still be prowling about. Then suddenly came the most welcome sound of their lives —the chug-chug-chug of a motorboat.

"The government survey launch!" Hodgins called out gladly and they rose to their feet.

AT 5 O'CLOCK that afternoon, old Mika Dodawa was standing behind his counter, smooth and smiling as usual, when the door opened and Chisholm and Hodgins, in immaculate white, stepped in, followed by the commissioner of police.

The old man clutched at the counter while his eyes bulged as if he were seeing ghosts.

"It's all right, Mika!" Hodgins grinned. "We're not ghosts! And we're all here—all except the tips of our ears!"

But the old man did not answer. Only, as the police led him out, he was heard to mutter something to himself about "the will of Allah!"

Note.—The Leopard Society of the West Coast of Africa is not of fictitious origin. Within the last ten years, a series of murders so startling and gruesome, even in a country where the gruesome abounds, roused the British government to action. Upon investigation it was discovered that the murders were committed by a powerful secret organization known as the Leopard Society. Its power extended down the whole coast but concentrated especially in Sierra Leone. The victims, usually natives but in one or two cases white men, were always found in a terribly mauled condition, as if by a monster leopard. Bits of leopard fur always littered the killing ground. The most puzzling feature of the case was that in every instance the abdomen had been ripped open, the pancreas removed, and the body drained of blood. In 1915 the government succeeded in capturing a number of the members. Among them were several highly educated, English-speaking, influential natives. Some had even held civil appointments. These all paid the full penalty of the law in 1916. The records of the trial may be seen in the crime annals of Sierra Leone. Owing to the difficulty of getting either the prisoners or witnesses to testify, however, little real information was gained concerning the society itself beyond the fact that the Leopards disguised themselves in skins, mauled their victims with leopard claws and actually drank the blood. Some hold the theory that it is a "Black Hand Society" used for purposes of revenge. The more popular and logical conclusion, however, is that it is a fanatical religious sect, which has existed from primeval days and which practises cannibalism as a religious rite. Whichever theory is correct, it is a known fact that in the heart of the West African bush this society still flourishes and remains the most sinister mystery of that still mysterious country.

HUNGER

By FRANK OWEN

Author of "Shadows," "The Man Who Lived Next Door to Himself," etc.

ALL his life Mel Curran had been hungry. He had never known the pleasure of sitting down to a good meal. Hunger is a rat that gnaws at a man's stomach as if it were an empty, untenanted house whose beams were sagging.

Mel Curran was not a credit to humanity, but then neither was humanity a credit to him. He was undersized, underfed, and his mind was not normal. He believed that the dusk-shadows of evening were haunted by all sorts of weird ghosts and wraiths. He was more credulous than a child. He believed everything he heard, everything that was told to him, no matter how fantastic or preposterous. He believed that night was filled with creeping, crawling things, that sleep was a dreadful state. Each night he fought against it. He subjected himself to physical pain to escape the horror of unconsciousness. He held the lids of his eyes open so that the black horror could not creep in. All night long he kept a candle burning beside his bed so that the whirling, plunging, closing net of darkness would not close down upon him. Sometimes he groaned and shrieked in terror, and the sounds of his anguish echoed weirdly throughout the dank, cobweb-draped cellar in which he dwelt. For hours he would fight off the plague of sleep, but eventually, inevitably, from sheer exhaustion he would succumb to it.

Another of his eccentricities was his total vagueness regarding numbers. To him "one", "six", "seven", or any other numeral was merely a word without meaning, and not infrequently his vision also became jumbled. He would see the same man two or three times at once. He never knew how many men were walking toward him. Sometimes it would be only one man and he would appear like four, or, as not infrequently happened, it would be four men and they would appear to him like one. There were times when he walked smack into a person because his distorted vision had taken the person for a group. The same phenomenon was true of buildings, of trees, of automobiles, of stairways. When he walked down a subway stairs he walked as gingerly as if he were walking on eggs, for it was as if he were trying to descend several flights of stairs at once and he was unaware which he was really treading upon.

His life was filled with horrors and tragedies, with fears and desires and dim hopes that never were realized. But greater than all his desires was the supreme wish for a good meal. He was well past sixty, and very thin, like a wisp of straw. He was very tall, and his clothes were greasy and green with age. His eyes always shone fanatically and they bore a searching, hunted, haunted look. Sometimes he would spy a filthy crust of bread by the curbstone. Immediately he would rush forward and devour it as if all the people of New York had perceived it also and were pursuing it. Not infrequently the bit of crust would seem multiplied to four or five pieces, and he would grovel and whine pitifully when he could find only one. He was a familiar sight on the waterfronts, creeping about like an ugly shadow, sinister, ominous, dangerous, as if bent on

some uncanny, dreadful mission, and yet his mission was purely an endless search for food to appease the loathsome gnawing rat that was clawing at his stomach—hunger.

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ONE night he stood before a window in a small restaurant on South Street. The window was a vault containing the most precious of all jewels—food. He licked his dry lips with his doglike tongue. In the moonlight his teeth glistened like fangs: the gums seemed drawn back from them to permit greater ease in chewing. In the window was a cold boiled ham, a huge cake, a box of strawberries and a few garnishings of vegetables. But in his vision all this was multiplied. There was enough food for an army. His mouth watered so that the froth dripped from his lips at the corners. Everything on earth was blotted out. He had found food. He gazed furtively about to see that no one was approaching. Then deliberately he climbed up the side of the door as if he had been a jungle beast. It was quite easy to climb through the huge transom above the door, which, fortunately, was wide open. The next moment he was in the restaurant and the ham had been snatched from the window. In his frenzy he crouched upon the floor chewing at it as if he were a dog. All caution had fled from him. He fairly gloated over his prize, grunting and growling with satisfaction.

The restaurant proprietor dwelt upstairs. He heard the commotion and rose stealthily from his bed. He seized a huge revolver, so large that it appeared like a cannon, and crept downstairs. Mel Curran on his knees was fawning over the ham.

For a moment the restaurant proprietor gazed on him. Every nerve in his body revolted at the sight. He could not help shuddering. Then he pulled himself together.

"Throw up your hands!" he cried angrily.

Mel Curran only whined and chewed at the ham all the more ferociously. Then the revolver went off, whether deliberately or accidentally will never be known. Mel Curran was not touched. But the crash of the shot brought back to him a bit of rationality. He realized that his precious food was about to be taken from him.

With a cry of rage, he sprang to his feet. He seized the first thing his hand fell upon. It was an enormous platter, a platter that must have weighed a dozen pounds. With all his force he brought it down upon the intruder's head. With a groan the restaurant proprietor sank to the floor.

Then Mel Curran returned to his precious food.

He crouched over the huge ham as if it were a child and he were intent on protecting it.

The next moment the doors were burst open and the street mob surged in. It was headed by two burly policemen, who dragged him away from all that was dearest to him on earth.

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TWO months later, for the first time in his life, Mel Curran sat down to a feast fit for the gods, a turkey dinner with all the usual Yuletide trimmings. There was cranberry sauce, plum pudding, all sorts of fruits and nuts, and an enormous mince pie. He sat and ate slowly and deliberately. For the moment his vision was normal. First he ate to appease the gnawing of the rat, then he continued eating purely for his own pleasure. At last the appetite of his life was satisfied. When the meal was finished, he drank three cups of coffee and a glass of cider.

Then he smoked a huge cigar. He heaved a sigh of satisfaction. He had not lived in vain.

When his meal was finished, he was given a somber black suit. Wonderfully content, he arrayed himself in it. Everybody was trying to outdo everybody else in being nice to him. A chaplain came to see him, a man whose face was truly beautiful—beautiful with a calm and restful peace.

"Have you anything to say, my brother?" the chaplain asked in a voice that was as soft as the wind through the treetops.

"Nothing," replied Mel Curran contentedly. "That was the finest meal I ever ate. I shall never forget it."

The chaplain placed his hand on his shoulder and prayed aloud. It was all very wonderful, Mel thought. It seemed rather fine to have people taking such an interest in him.

Then the gate of his cell was thrown open and he was led to the grim, gray chamber in which stood the electric chair. He gazed upon the scene blankly. He wondered what they were going to do with so many chairs. Without a word they led him to the gruesome chair. He sat down comfortably as if it were good to rest after such an enormous meal. He gazed at the little group of spectators who sat grimly in a huddled bunch on one side of the room. Their faces were chalklike in the shadows. To him the score of people seemed a multitude. And their gaze was centered on him as if he were a personage of prominence or an actor in a splendid play.

Someone stepped forward and placed a black cap over his eyes.

That was good. Now he could sleep.

Then other hands began fastening buckles about his legs and other parts of his body. That was very foolish. He was not going away. He was going to sleep.

Then the guards stepped back. There was a moment of utter silence—a silence so intense that it was almost deafening. The next instant the prison lights flickered dim. Then bright again, then dim.

Mel Curran would never be hungry again.

THE BETTER CHOICE

By C. M. EDDY, JR.

This man contrived a machine that would revive the dead, and killed himself to try out his invention. But as he was being brought back to life, something happened

In WEIRD TALES for March

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS FEBRUARY FIRST

FOUR WOODEN STAKES

A TALE OF VAMPIRES

by Victor Rowan

THERE it lay on the desk in front of me, that missive so simple in wording, yet so perplexing, so urgent in tone.

Jack:

Come at once for old-times' sake. Am all alone. Will explain upon arrival.

Remson.

Having spent the past three weeks in bringing to a successful termination a case that had puzzled the police and two of the best detective agencies in the city, I decided I was entitled to a rest, so I ordered two grips packed and went in search of a timetable. It was several years since I had seen Remson Holroyd; in fact, I had not seen him since we had matriculated from college together. I was curious to know how he was getting along, to say nothing of the little diversion he promised me in the way of a mystery.

The following afternoon found me standing on the platform of the little town of Charing, a village of about fifteen hundred souls. Remson's place was about ten miles from there, so I stepped forward to the driver of a shay and asked if he would kindly take me to the Holroyd estate. He clasped his hands in what seemed to be a silent prayer, shuddered slightly, then looked at me with an air of wonder, mingled with suspicion.

"I dun't know whut ye wants to go out there fer, stranger, but if ye'll take the advice o' a God-fearin' man ye'll turn back where ye come from. There be some mighty fearful tales concernin' that place floatin' around, and more'n one tramp's been found near there so weak from loss of blood and fear he could hardly crawl. They's somethin' there. Be it man or beast I dun't know, but as fer me, I wouldn't drive ye out there for a hundred dollars—cash."

This was not at all encouraging, but I was not to be influenced by the talk of a superstitious old gossip, so I cast about for a less impressionable rustic who would undertake the trip to earn the ample reward I promised at the end of the ride. To my chagrin, they all acted like the first; some crossed themselves fervently, while others gave me one wild look and ran, as if I were in alliance with the devil.

By now my curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and I was determined to see the thing through to a finish if it cost me my life. So, casting a last, contemptuous look on those poor, misguided souls, I stepped out briskly in the direction pointed out to me. However, I had gone but a scant two miles

when the weight of the valises began to tell, and I slackened pace considerably.

The sun was just disappearing beneath the treetops when I caught my first glimpse of the old homestead, now deserted but for its one occupant. Time and the elements had laid heavy hands upon it, for there was hardly a window that could boast its full quota of panes, while the shutters banged and creaked with a noise dismal enough to daunt even the strong of heart.

About one hundred yards back I discerned a small building built of gray stone, pieces of which seemed to be lying all around it, partly covered by the dense growth of vegetation that overran the entire countryside. On closer observation I realized that the building was a crypt, while what I had taken to be pieces of the material scattered around were really tombstones. Evidently this was the family burying ground. But why had certain members been interred in a mausoleum while the remainder of the family had been buried in the ground in the usual manner?

Having observed thus much, I turned my steps toward the house, for I had no intention of spending the night with naught but the dead for company. Indeed, I began to realize just why those simple country folk had refused to aid me, and a hesitant doubt began to assert itself as to the expediency of my being here, when I might have been at the shore or at the country club enjoying life to the full.

By now the sun had completely slid from view, and in the semi-darkness the place presented an even drearier aspect than before. With a great display of bravado I stepped upon the veranda, slammed my grips upon a seat very much the worse for wear, and pulled lustily at the knob.

Peal after peal reverberated throughout the house, echoing and re-echoing from room to room, till the whole structure rang. Then all was still once more, save for the sighing of the wind and the creaking of the shutters.

A FEW minutes passed, and the sound of footsteps approaching the door reached my ears. Another interval, and the door was cautiously opened a few inches, while a head shrouded by the darkness scrutinized me closely. Then the door was flung wide, and Remson (I hardly knew him, so changed was he) rushed forward and, throwing his arms around me, thanked me again and again for heeding his plea, till I thought he would go into hysterics.

I begged him to brace up, and the sound of my voice seemed to help him, for he apologized rather shamefacedly for his discourtesy and led the way along the wide hall. There was a fire blazing merrily away in the sitting room, and after partaking generously of a repast, for I was famished after my long walk, I was seated in front of it, facing Remson and waiting to hear his story.

"Jack," he began, "I'll start at the beginning and try to give you the facts in their proper sequence. Five years ago my family circle consisted of five persons: my grandfather, my father, two brothers, and myself, the baby of the family. My mother died, you know, when I was a baby. Now—"

His voice broke and for a moment he was unable to continue.

"There's only myself left," he went on, "and so help me God, I'm going, too, unless you can solve the damnable mystery that hovers over this house, and put an end to that something which took my kin and is gradually taking me.

"Granddad was the first to go. He spent the last few years of his life in South America. Just before leaving there he was attacked while asleep by

one of those huge bats. Next morning he was so weak he couldn't walk. That awful thing had sucked his life blood away. He arrived here, but was sickly until his death, a few weeks later. The medicos couldn't agree as to the cause of death, so they laid it to old age and let it go at that. But I knew better. It was his experience in the south that had done for him. In his will he asked that a crypt be built immediately and his body interred therein. His wish was carried out, and his remains lie in that little gray vault that you may have noticed if you cut around behind the house. Then my dad began failing and just pined away until he died. What puzzled the doctors was the fact that right up until the end he consumed enough food to sustain three men, yet he was so weak he lacked the strength to drag his legs over the floor. He was buried, or rather interred, with granddad. The same symptoms were in evidence in the cases of George and Fred. They are both lying in the vault. And now, Jack, I'm going, too, for of late my appetite has increased to alarming proportions, yet I am as weak as a kitten."

"Nonsense!" I chided. "We'll just leave this place for a while and take a trip somewhere, and when you return you'll laugh at your fears. It's all a case of overwrought nerves, and there is certainly nothing strange about the deaths you speak of. Probably due to some hereditary disease. More than one family has passed out in a hurry just on that account."

"Jack, I only wish I could think so, but somehow I know better. And as for leaving here, I just can't. Understand, I hate the place; I loathe it, but I can't get away. There is a morbid fascination about the place which holds me. If you want to be a real friend, just stick around for a couple of days, and if you don't find anything I'm sure the sight of you and the sound of your voice will do wonders for me."

I agreed to do my best, although I was hard put to keep from smiling at his fears, so apparently groundless were they. We talked on other subjects for several hours, then I proposed bed, saying that I was very tired after my journey and subsequent walk. Remson showed me to my room, and, after seeing that everything was as comfortable as possible, he bade me good-night.

As he turned to leave the room the flickering light from the lamp fell on his neck and I noticed two small punctures in the skin. I questioned him regarding them, but he replied that he must have beheaded a pimple and that he hadn't noticed them before. He again said good-night and left the room.

I UNDRESSED and tumbled into bed. During the night I was conscious of an overpowering feeling of suffocation—as if some great burden was lying on my chest which I could not dislodge; and in the morning, when I awoke, I experienced a curious sensation of weakness. I arose, not without an effort, and began divesting myself of my sleeping suit.

As I folded the jacket I noticed a thin line of blood on the collar. I felt my neck, a terrible fear overwhelming me. It pained slightly at the touch. I rushed to examine it in the mirror. Two tiny dots rimmed with blood—my blood—and on my neck! No longer did I chuckle at Remson's fears, for *it*, the thing, had attacked me as I slept!

I dressed as quickly as my condition would permit and went downstairs, thinking to find my friend there. He was not about, so I looked about outside, but he was not in evidence. There was but one answer to the question. He had not yet arisen. It was 9 o'clock, so I resolved to awaken him.

Not knowing which room he occupied, I entered one after another in a fruitless search. They were all in various stages of disorder, and the thick coating of dust on the furniture showed that they had been untenanted for some time. At last, in a bedroom on the north side of the third floor, I found him.

He was lying spread-eagle fashion across the bed, still in his pajamas, and as I leaned forward to shake him my eyes fell on two drops of blood, splattered on the coverlet. I crushed back a wild desire to scream and shook Remson rather roughly. His head rolled to one side, and the hellish perforations on his throat showed up vividly. They looked fresh and raw, and had increased to much greater dimensions. I shook him with increased vigor, and at last he opened his eyes stupidly and looked around. Then, seeing me, he said in a voice loaded with anguish, resignation, and despair:

"It's been here again, Jack. I can't hold out much longer. May God take my soul when I do!"

So saying, he fell back again from sheer weakness. I left him and went about preparing myself some breakfast. I had thought it best not to destroy his faith in me by telling him that I, too, had suffered at the hands of his persecutor.

A walk brought me some peace of mind, if not a solution, and when I returned about noon to the big house Remson was up and around. Together we prepared a really excellent meal. I was hungry and did justice to my share; but after I had finished, my friend continued eating until I thought he must either disgorge or burst. Then, after putting things to rights, we strolled about the long hall, looking at the oil paintings, many of which were very valuable.

At one end of the hall I discovered a portrait of an old gentleman, evidently a Beau Brummel in his day. He wore his hair in the long, flowing fashion adopted by the old school, and sported a carefully trimmed mustache and Vandyke beard. Remson noticed my interest in the painting and came forward.

"I don't wonder that picture holds your interest, Jack. It has a great fascination for me, also. At times I sit for hours studying the expression on that face. I sometimes think he has something to tell me, but of course that's all tommyrot. But I beg your pardon, I haven't introduced the old gent yet, have I? This is my granddad. He was a great old boy in his day, and he might be living yet but for that cursed bloodsucker. Perhaps it is such a creature that's doing for me; what do you think?"

"I wouldn't like to venture an opinion, Remson, but unless I'm badly mistaken we must dig deeper for an explanation. We'll know tonight, however. You retire as usual and I'll keep a close watch and we'll solve the riddle or die in the attempt."

Remson said not a word, but silently extended his hand. I clasped it in a firm embrace and in each other's eyes we read complete understanding. To change the trend of thought I questioned him on the servant problem.

"I've tried time and again to get servants that would stay," he replied, "but about the third day they would begin acting queer, and the first thing I'd know they'd have skipped, bag and baggage."

That night I accompanied my friend to his room and remained until he had disrobed and was ready to retire. Several of the window panes were cracked, and one was entirely missing. I suggested boarding up the aperture, but he declined, saying that he rather enjoyed the night air, so I dropped the matter.

As it was still early, I sat by the fire in the sitting room and read for an hour or two. I confess that there

were many times when my mind wandered from the printed page before me and chills raced up and down my spine as some new sound was borne to my ears. The wind had risen, and was whistling through the trees with a peculiar whining sound. The creaking of the shutters tended to further the eery effect, and in the distance could be heard the hooting of numerous owls, mingled with the cries of miscellaneous night fowl and other nocturnal creatures.

As I ascended the two flights of steps, the candle in my hand casting grotesque shadows on the walls and ceiling, I had little liking for my job. Many times in the course of duty I had been called upon to display courage, but it took more than mere courage to keep me going now.

I EXTINGUISHED the candle and crept forward to Remson's room, the door of which was closed. Being careful to make no noise, I knelt and looked in at the keyhole. It afforded me a clear view of the bed and two of the windows in the opposite wall. Gradually my eye became accustomed to the darkness and I noticed a faint reddish glow outside one of the windows. It apparently emanated from nowhere. Hundreds of little specks danced and whirled in the spot of light, and as I watched them, fascinated, they seemed to take on the form of a human face. The features were masculine, as was also the arrangement of the hair. Then the mysterious glow disappeared.

So great had the strain been on me that I was wet from perspiration, although the night was quite cool. For a moment I was undecided whether to enter the room or to stay where I was and use the keyhole as a means of observation. I concluded that to remain where I was would be the better plan, so I once more placed my eye to the hole.

Immediately my attention was drawn to something moving where the light had been. At first, owing to the poor light, I was unable to distinguish the general outline and form of the thing; then I saw. It was a man's head.

So help me God, it was the exact reproduction of that picture I had seen in the hall that very morning. But, oh, the difference in expression! The lips were drawn back in a snarl, disclosing two sets of pearly white teeth, the canines over-developed and remarkably sharp. The eyes, an emerald green in color, stared in a look of consuming hate. The hair was sadly disarranged, while on the beard was a large clot of what seemed to be congealed blood.

I noticed thus much, then the head melted from my sight and I transferred my attention to a great bat that circled round and round, his huge wings beating a tattoo on the panes. Finally he circled around the broken pane and flew straight through the hole made by the missing glass. For a few moments he was shut off from my view, then he reappeared and began circling around my friend, who lay sound asleep, blissfully ignorant of all that was occurring. Nearer and nearer it drew, then swooped down and fastened itself on Remson's throat, just over the jugular vein.

At this I rushed into the room and made a wild dash for the thing that had come night after night to gorge itself on my friend; but to no avail. It flew out of the window and away, and I turned my attention to the sleeper.

"Remson, old man, get up."

He sat up like a shot.

"What's the matter, Jack, has it been here?"

"Never mind just now," I replied. "Just dress as hurriedly as possible. We have a little work before us this evening."

He glanced questioningly toward me, but followed my command without argument. I turned and cast my eye about the room for a suitable weapon. There was a stout stick lying in the corner and I made toward it.

"Jack!"

I wheeled about.

"What is it? Damn it all, haven't you any sense, almost scaring a man to death?"

He pointed a shaking finger toward the window.

"There! I swear I saw him. It was my granddad, but oh, how disfigured!"

He threw himself upon the bed and began sobbing. The shock had completely unnerved him.

"Forgive me, old man," I pleaded; "I was too quick. Pull yourself together and we may get to the bottom of things tonight yet."

I handed him my flask. He took a generous swallow and squared up.

When he had finished dressing we left the house. There was no moon out, and it was pitch dark.

I LED the way, and soon we came to within ten yards of the little gray crypt. I stationed Remson behind a tree with instructions to just use his eyes, and I took up my stand on the other side of the vault, after making sure that the door into it was closed and locked. For the greater part of an hour we waited without results, and I was about ready to call it off when I perceived a white figure flitting between the trees about fifty feet away.

Slowly it advanced, straight toward us, and as it drew closer I looked, not *at* it, but *through* it. The wind was blowing strongly, yet not a fold in the long shroud quivered. Just outside the vault it paused and looked around. Even knowing as I did about what to expect, it was a decided shock when I looked into the eyes of the old Holroyd, deceased these past five years. I heard a gasp and knew that Remson had seen, too, and recognized. Then the spirit, ghost, or whatever it was, passed into the crypt through the crack between the door and the jamb, a space not one-sixteenth of an inch wide.

As it disappeared, Remson came running forward, his face wholly drawn of color.

"What was it, Jack, what was it? I know it resembled granddad, but it couldn't have been he. He's been dead five years!"

"Let us go back to the house," I answered, "and I'll do my best to explain things to the best of my ability. I may be wrong, of course, but it won't hurt to try my remedy. Remson, what we are up against is a vampire. Not the female species usually spoken of today, but the real thing. I noticed you had an old edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*. If you'll bring me volume XXIV I'll be able to explain more fully the meaning of the word."

He left the room and returned, carrying the desired book. Turning to page 52, I read:

Vampire. A term apparently of Servian origin originally applied in eastern Europe to blood-sucking ghosts, but in modern usage transferred to one or more species of blood-sucking bats inhabiting South America. . . . In the first mentioned meaning a vampire is usually supposed to be the soul of a dead man which quits the buried body by night to suck the blood of living persons. Hence, when the vampire's grave is opened his corpse is found to be fresh and rosy from the blood thus absorbed. . . . They are accredited with the power of assuming any form they may so desire, and often fly about as specks of dust, pieces of down or straw, etc. . . . To put an end to his ravages a stake is driven through him, or his head cut off, or his heart torn out, or boiling water and vinegar poured over the grave. . . . The persons who turn vampires are wizards, witches, suicides, and

those who have come to a violent end. Also, the death of anyone resulting from these vampires will cause that person to join their hellish throng. . . . See Calumet's "Dissertation on the Vampires of Hungary."

I looked at Remson. He was staring straight into the fire. I knew that he realized the task before us and was steeling himself to it. Then he turned to me.

"Jack, we'll wait until morning."

That was all. I understood, and he knew. There we sat, each struggling with his own thoughts, until the first faint glimmers of light came struggling through the trees and warned us of approaching dawn.

Remson left to fetch a sledge hammer and a large knife with its edge honed to a razorlike keenness. I busied myself making four wooden stakes, shaped like wedges. He returned bearing the horrible tools, and we struck out toward the crypt. We walked rapidly, for had either hesitated an instant I verily believe both would have fled incontinently. However, our duty lay clearly before us. Remson unlocked the door and swung it outward. With a prayer on our lips, we entered.

As if by mutual understanding, we both turned toward the coffin on our left. It belonged to the grandfather. We unplaced the lid, and there lay the old Holroyd. He appeared to be sleeping; his face was full of color, and he had none of the stiffness of death. The hair was matted, the mustache untrimmed, and on the beard were matted stains of a dull brownish hue.

But it was his eyes that attracted me. They were greenish, and they glowed with an expression of fiendish malevolence such as I had never seen before. The look of baffled rage on the face might well have adorned the features of the devil in his hell.

Remson swayed and would have fallen, but I forced some whisky down his throat and he took a grip on himself. He placed one of the stakes directly over its heart, then shut his eyes and prayed that the good God above take this soul that was to be delivered unto Him.

I TOOK a step backward, aimed carefully, and swung the sledge with all my strength. It hit the wedge squarely, and a terrible scream filled the place, while the blood gushed out of the open wound, up, and over us, staining the walls and our clothes. Without hesitating, I swung again, and again, and again, while it struggled vainly to rid itself of that awful instrument of death. Another swing and the stake was driven through.

The thing squirmed about in the narrow confines of the coffin, much after the manner of a dismembered worm, and Remson proceeded to sever the head from the body, making a rather crude but effectual job of it. As the final stroke of the knife cut the connection a scream issued from the mouth; and the whole corpse fell away into dust, leaving nothing but a wooden stake lying in a bed of bones.

This finished, we despatched the remaining three. Simultaneously, as if struck by the same thought, we felt our throats. The slight pain was gone from mine, and the wounds had entirely disappeared from my friend's, leaving not even a scar.

I wished to place before the world the whole facts contingent upon the mystery and the solution, but Remson prevailed upon me to hold my peace.

Some years later Remson died a Christian death, and with him went the only confirmation of my tale. However, ten miles from the little town of Charing there sits an old house, forgotten these many years, and near it is a little gray crypt. Within are four coffins; and in each lies a wooden stake stained a brownish hue, and bearing the finger prints of the deceased Remson Holroyd.

AN UNCLAIMED REWARD

by STRICKLAND GILLILAN

Author of "When We Killed Thompson"

WE NEVER did get to Grimes' schoolhouse that night.

Personally, I have had the most delicious and satisfying thrills of wickedness every time I have thought of that evening and its attendant events. The thrills have not been scarce, for I have thought of it often.

I believe sincerely that none of us felt wicked or conscience stricken at the time. Hunkydory, at least, knew that we were shielding an escaped prisoner with a murderous reputation. I have never been quite so sure what Dicky Birch thought or knew about it.

I remember it chiefly as a time when, for about four gloriously horrible hours, I felt as if my entire alimentary canal were frozen stiff and never would thaw out. Fear always inserts a drawstring or a dose of frappé alum-water at the pit of my stomach.

There was to be (and probably was, though, as I say, we didn't get to it) a "spelling" at Grimes' schoolhouse that night. Grimes' was the next district to ours, about two miles away. Pap had grudgingly consented that I might go to it, with Dicky Birch, who lived just beyond the edge of our big bottom meadow, beside the Dug Road. I had hurried through with the milking, wood-carrying and other chores, had swallowed a big supper in a manner that would have scandalized Horace Fletcher, blacked my boots, and had gone down to the meadow gate by our schoolhouse, where Dicky was to meet me. He answered my whistle immediately, there in the dusk by the wild plum tree, and we started. We were in great feather, leaping high, as fourteen-year-olds will when released for a few sweet, short hours from iron-handed paternal surveillance.

We followed the path, single file, our boots clumping noisily down the hill and our eager chatter waking the echoes as we went. Along the line-fence between our meadow and the weed-patch that might have been the shiftless Allards' meadow we marched. Dicky, who was ahead, suddenly let out a fine beginning for a loud yell, which sank and perished in his throat like a death-rattle.

I was beside him by then, for I could not have kept back. I am the kind of coward that wins undying fame in battles, for fear paralyzes my reverse and turning gear and makes me go forward. Dicky and I were facing a ghastly, black-stubbled countenance with blue lips, and a convulsively-working Adam's apple in a scraggy, unkempt and collarless throat. But the thing that definitely

held us (though hardly less than that fascinating face itself) was a large, blue-steel revolver grasped with wonderful steadiness in a hairy hand that protruded from a too-scant coat-sleeve. I can see the large wrist-joints yet, their points white from the rigidity of his grip.

"You—you fellers," panted the voice, hoarse and shaking with mingled fear and desperation, "you fellers come with me. I ain't goin' to take no chances on it a-gittin' out where I'm at."

We obeyed and crept along stealthily through the deepening dusk, at the point of that blue-nosed gun. I asked Dicky about it just once afterward (we whispered it when we were alone in the woods far from human habitation) if he had ever thought of Grimes' schoolhouse again that evening, and he solemnly assured me that he hadn't.

I cannot say we were unhappy in our captivity. It was the first real thrill that had ever invaded either of our prosaic, hay-pitching, cattle-feeding, chore-enslaved lives. It was a yellow-back dream come to realization. We cooned the peeled pole that served as a line-fence water-gap across Jesse Lick, and kept straight on toward Hunkydory's place. Once Dicky's foot slipped and he looked around, whimpering in terror and with fear-popped eyes, lest our captor think he was trying to desert. The man almost smiled as he realized how little danger of resistance was to be anticipated from us. We were completely subjugated.

WHEN we were separated by nothing but a willow-thicket and a stake-and-rider fence from Hunkydory's house and carpenter shop, the man motioned with his gun, and he reconnoitered while we cowered like well-trained bird-dogs in the long weeds.

"Coast clear," he muttered, more to himself than to us. "Go on, you kids, and don't try no funny stuff or I'll fill ye full o' holes while you're climbin' th' fence—hah!"

It was a combined gasp and cry of terror, cautiously muffled. A hound's musical note rang suddenly out of the stillness near by. The hound was so close we could hear its snorting snuffle as it nosed the trail. The man froze in his tracks, and turned such a color as I never before or since have seen. Dicky and I knew very well it was only Ab Allard's black-and-tan bitch, old Belle, trying to pick up the temporarily lost trail of a mink that lived near the creek. But it was five age-long minutes before the strange man seemed to breathe again and relaxed enough to indicate his desire that we continue our forced march.

A dash across the big road and we were at the door of the carpenter shop. Nobody had seen us from the road, and Hunkydory, with his family, was eating dinner by the dim coal-oil lamp in the one room of the cabin adjoining. They were wrangling noisily as they ate, like pigs squealing around the trough, so they didn't hear us as we entered. But before the stranger could drop the hasp (a heavy wooden thing) into the slot, to fasten us in, Hunkydory himself was heard approaching. He left his front door and started into his darkened shop with a half-shaved ax-handle in his hand. We all shrank back into the shadows that were no more silent than we—for by now we boys were sympathetically deep in the spirit of criminality.

Hunkydory approached his work-bench. As he did so, he looked suspiciously about at the impenetrable shadows. He was between us and the window, so we could see him easily. He fumblingly picked up a piece of sandpaper by the vise, and as he did so the stranger sprang like a puma and grabbed him. Hunkydory's in-

voluntary and instinctive cry of surprize was strangled in his whiskery whisky-gullet by one hairy hand while its mate held that respect-compelling gun before the popping and rheumy eyes. A harsh voice, low and horribly distinct, said: "Not a cheep, old man! Not a damn cheep!"

We boys thrilled in sympathy with our captor-hero (for such by now he had become) and our fingers twitched toward the old man's throat, as the claws of a kitten work while the mother-cat demonstrates the kill for her offspring's education. Such resentment as we had ever had was utterly gone.

As soon as Hunkydory was released and his breath had returned, the gossip-loving, scandal-monging old rascal's loquacity revived. The adventure was walnuts and wine to his humdrum-surfeited soul.

"I know who you are," he whispered ecstatically. "Brother Ab was in town today an' he tole"—

"Hush! You know too damn much. You know any more an' I'll choke ye to death," hissed the stranger, in unassumed melodramatic style. "Now you keep your face shet an' keep quiet in here. Is your folks expectin' you back—will they hunt ye?"

"No," whispered Hunkydory with great delight. "I'd started over t' Ab's t' finish scrapin' this hannel."

"All right. We'll lay low a while, an' if them dawgs don't show up, you fellers'll show me th' way to th' Gulf. I've missed it somehow."

"The Gulf" was a place such as was without a duplicate in all southern Ohio. An almost impenetrable forest covered and filled a canyon whose walling cliffs, some hundred to two hundred feet high, almost met at the top. In some parts of it, the sun shone in for only a few minutes each day, as down a chimney—an ideal hiding-place. It lay about three miles from Hunkydory's.

We stayed in Hunkydory's shop two mortal hours. Once, in the distance, we heard the baying of hounds, and there were several of them. None was the voice of old Belle, either. They were dogs whose voices Dicky and I and Hunkydory had never heard before. The four of us drew near to each other and all chilled at the sound. As it grew nearer for a few minutes and one bell-like note sounded with especial clearness, we all seized each other convulsively. Not one of us knew, at that moment, which of us was the criminal. But the sound of the hounds died out, and all grew quiet as the grave.

At length we started. Hunkydory peeped out stealthily at first. The stranger peeped out next, and after a careful reconnaissance we ventured forth like four dusky ghosts into the silent, star-strewn night, soft-footed as wolves—four primitive fugitives grown from the terror and the need of one. The gun was needed no longer, but the stranger carried it in his hand. We went of our own fascinated, hypnotized impulse. Had the hounds come then we should all have run and clung and, if need be, fought together in common cause against a common enemy.

Past Brook's and Bennett's and Harper's and Aleshire's we fled—always toward the Gulf. Now and then came the yap of a wakened yellow cur. Once we hid in a creek-bed under a culvert while a pack of foxhounds swept by, belling lustily like a canine cyclone, within a hundred yards of us. Then we went on.

JUST as we had struggled up a shingly hillside sparsed over with broom-sedge in clumps of brown, and darkly dotted with baby pines and huckleberry bushes, the stranger came close to the three of us and said:

"You fellers stop here a minute. I want to go in there. Don't leave!"

And he pointed to a cabin only a few yards away, half in the shadow of the first fringe of the woods that merged into the Gulf.

We nodded our heads and saw him disappear against the blackness. Then a door was opened, and we saw, silhouetted by a dim firelight, a woman in her night-clothes, who had come to the door in answer to a whippoorwill call from outside. We saw two white arms fly about a portion of the darkness, and through the opening, while the door was still ajar, we heard sobs. They were not all a woman's sobs, either. There were deeper, harder, more rasping sobs from a throat to which sobs were less frequent visitors. Such sobs!

Then, and for the first time, we felt the impulse to desert. It was from no defection in loyalty, and not altogether from fear. We had forgot that. It was only that feeling of delicacy—a this-is-no-place-for-me feeling—which male creatures know in the presence of a sob-wrung fellow male who is in the arms of his mate. But once the spirit of retreat was upon us, nerve-strained as we were, it swept us as had the other feeling up to a few minutes before.

Hunkydory whispered:

"Let's skedaddle, boys!"

And we skedaddled. Fear returned as we retreated. Many a time had I heard Hunkydory complain of shortness of breath and a "misery" in his side or some kindred ail when he was being paid to help Pap in the harvest field. He could never rake and bind wheat behind the cradle more than half an hour at a time without being threatened with a "smotherin' spell." But that night we two lusty boys had hard work to keep his pace. A deer in the full flush of buckhood would have known next day it had been somewhere, had it attempted to stay with him on that journey home. A grayhound would have had little on Hunkydory that night in the way of speed and lightness and staying powers, as we three, the grizzled old sot in the van, ran like perspiring and silent moonbeams back along the trail we had so recently trod.

We left Hunkydory at his carpenter shop door. For the first time we noticed he still had the half-shaved ax handle and the piece of sandpaper with him, though he hadn't even known it himself.

Dicky and I started home. When we got to the separating place, we clung to each other. I wanted Dicky to go home with me, but he objected because he would have farther to go alone afterward. He wanted me to take him home, but the same argument held good. We shuddered together for quite a while and then, as with one fear-born impulse, we jerked violently loose from each other and ran like sheep-killing dogs in our opposite directions.

I can feel that homeward trip yet. An icy hand was reaching for my back, all the way, and so nearly getting me that a frozen emanation from it kept me chilled. I shuddered into bed, and nothing but youth and physical exhaustion put me to sleep. Once in the night—or did I dream it?—came again the belling of strange hound voices, rising and falling, now clear, now muffled, as the trees and hillocks intervened or removed themselves.

And I cowered closer.

Next day Hez Bradley brought a *Cincinnati Enquirer* home from town. It had one heavily headlined dispatch with our county seat's date line on it, reading in substance as follows:

Ed Raffin, of Jackson township, who was confined in the county jail pending his execution for the murder of Harry Mortimer, is at large, or was at midnight. Raffin, it will be remembered, was convicted on a charge of first degree murder for having made away with Mortimer when the latter was superintending the construction of a

bridge near "the Gulf", a precipitous walled fastness near which Raffin lived and worked as a shingle-maker. Raffin did not make much attempt at defense, merely stating that Mortimer had insulted Raffin's wife. Raffin would not let his wife testify, merely stating that she was in no condition to appear in court, and that he wouldn't let her appear if she were. He said he had killed Mortimer justly, but that he supposed the law would have to take its course.

For the past few days Raffin had been trying to get the officers to take him to his home to see to his wife, but the request was necessarily refused, and he became morose and sullen. He evidently had friends on the outside, for this evening, he drew a large black six-shooter, clubbed Jailer Epps into insensibility with the butt of it, took the keys from the unconscious man's pocket, and escaped. Bloodhounds were put on the trail, and they traced him to the little settlement known as Allardtown, west of town, and there became confused. Later in the night they took up the same trail again, traced it to the door of "Hunkydory" Allard's carpenter shop, and again lost it completely.

The officers believe the bloodhounds were running on a wholly wrong trail, as Raffin is believed too shrewd to take a line so directly toward his own home. The dogs are almost utterly discredited, and search will be made in all other directions.

The sheriff was authorized today by the county commissioners in special session to offer a reward of $500 for any information leading to the arrest of Raffin or to definitely locating him.

HUNKYDORY ALLARD was very, very fond of rotgut whisky, and always lacked and coveted enough money to keep him very drunk for a long time. Knowing of the offered reward, he kept on getting only such whisky as he could buy with ax-handle money at fifty cents per helve.

Dicky Birch and I should have been immensely wealthy with any portion of $500, and could have bought the things we believed dearer to us than were our own souls.

But we kept on going without those things, and were as poor as ever.

For we had all three heard sobs in a cabin, in the night time. And some of them were a man's sobs.

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

The Flaming Eyes

A Complete Novelette

By FLETCHER R. MILTON

The baleful, glowing eyes of the Hindoo curio-dealer wrought a strange magic. Eery, wild, uncanny, were the adventures depicted in this story

On Sale At All News Stands February First

THE BROWN MOCCASIN

by David Baxter

BETWEEN banks heavily draped with long, flat slough-grass and overshadowed by lambent-leafed cottonwoods, the greenish waters of the slow-moving creek seemed utterly devoid of life. The Kansas sun poured a flare of somnolent heat directly upon the flaccid bosom of the lazy stream, intensifying the shadows behind the fringe of dry grass and making of them the only cool, damp retreat in the whole region. There was no wind; and scarcely a ripple where the tips of the rank, overhanging growth cut the water with an almost inaudible gurgle.

Close above the water, and close-led by his sharp-lined shadow, hovered a silent snake doctor intently studying the sluggish current in search of any infinitesimal morsel of food that might be drifting there. His bright-blue, black-banded wings of delicate gauze threw him into sharp contrast with the rest of the drab picture.

But in the black shadows along the soggy banks, and below the murky glaze on the surface of the water, life teemed in its mysteries and its myriad forms, giving the lie to outward appearance.

A repulsively incongruous alligator turtle, of impregnable size and armoring, watched with evil intent the slow but gradual approach of a school of brilliant-hued sunfish. King of the creek was he, with his spiked coat and horn-crested helmet. He feared no denizen of his world, and but for his massive clumsiness he would soon have cleared it of all life but his kind, for nature had created him almost invulnerable but had also placed restraint upon his voraciousness.

In a world where one life exists by preying upon another, this paradox must ever be true: each inhabitant must have some protection to prevent entire extinction, and each must have some special dispensation by which he may subsist through breaking down the protective barriers of the others.

However, beneath the edge of a tangle of drift, in the deepest part of the torpid stream, yet another pair of glassy eyes watched with cannibalistic intentions; watched for an opportunity to prey upon some weaker member of his watery domain; watched for a lowering of the barriers; a big catfish, with bristling whiskers and slowly gaping mouth, seeming fairly a part of the snarl of roots and twigs in which he was ambushed. The sharp spines on either side of his massive head were ready for instant defense, or for slaughter.

if his needs pressed him to attack the larger specimens of the water tribes. With his white belly buried in the slime and his black back blending with surrounding shadows, the marauder felt secure in his hiding place.

If further proof were needed to refute the appearance of lifelessness in the stagnant creek, it could be found beneath a flat ledge protruding from, and lying close to, the muddy floor of the stream. Here a mother crawfish was incessantly on guard over her large family of ever-hungry youngsters; guarding but always watching for the opportunity to dash out and seize an unsuspecting minnow to throw it into the midst of the squirming multitude of claws. Her protruding eyes saw everything that happened in the neighborhood. Her powerful pincers were ever alert to protect her brood, or to nip the life out of an unwary prey as food for them. But in spite of her formidable armament of claws and crusty shell, in spite of her ability to scuttle backward through the water like a flash of living red light, she dared not sally forth in search of a victim while the monster "snapper" remained in the vicinity.

A SLIGHT but startlingly sudden splash broke the stillness of the scene.

A long, lithe body had dived from a low-hanging limb of the stunted cottonwood tree that struggled to retain a root-hold on the steep bank. The sound was barely audible, but all of the denizens of the creek knew its portent and sought to snuggle closer in their respective dens. Even the powerful alligator turtle folded his tail and legs a bit closer beneath his parasite-laden shell and drew his horrid snout back until he could scarcely see what was taking place in the dim light about him.

There was but a momentary disturbance of the surface as the brown water moccasin slipped into the water, and no waves or ripples indicated her passage along the sandy bottom near the center of the creeping current.

The swimmer was a full-grown, female water snake of the common brown type, harmless as to venom but very powerful and extremely vicious when attacked. Doubly feared by the creatures of her world because she could take to the earth, trees, or water with equal facility, bred of the water and reared of the earth as she was, and now fearfully respected by the whole animal kingdom, her younger days had been spent in a continual fight for existence.

At the age of three years and full-grown she was now a careless swimmer making her way gracefully upstream unmolested. Scarcely visible from the surface, washed clean of the dried mud with which she had disguised herself while lying on the mud-gray limb of the cottonwood, she presented a strikingly beautiful appearance.

After swimming several rods, she came to the silky surface for a breath of air and a survey of the surroundings; the latter for the purpose of making certain there were no lurking dangers on either bank of the creek or in the trees above it. She had learned in her younger days to be forever on guard against hidden foes, in the water, in the air, or on land. She paused to float idly a moment while trying to locate a possible source of food for which a litter of forty squirming youngsters were constantly clamoring. It frequently happened that she could obtain this food without the hours of patient waiting for a frog or fish to pass her perch on a projecting limb or log.

Momentarily the brown-banded moccasin floated with the imperceptible current; then, with a powerful flirt of glistening tail, she proceeded more swiftly upstream, on her way to the nest of husky young ones she

had already left overlong. Many of them were nearly large enough to stray off in their first adventure with the world and might leave any time now if she stayed away too long. The rest were mere waxy morsels for some of the land tribes, among which were clans of her own kin, the bull snakes and black racers.

These young moccasins were a brood of which any snake mother might be proud, strikingly marked with jet black cross-bands on a pale gray background along the body and a black spotted abdomen of dull grayish hue. When left alone they formed into one writhing knot of reptiles, as they had been taught, both for the sake of safety through intimidation and for the companionship afforded by bodily contact. The little fellows would take on the pattern and coloring of the parent later on, but now they scarcely resembled her.

Slipping through the smooth water, throwing slow, miniature rollers on each side of her course, the big female moccasin presented a picture both fearsome and inspiring. Her reddish brown body, crossed by wavy, dark brown bands on the forward portion, alternating with much broader bands of black, caused her to appear almost solid brown, in contrast with the green water. Crossed by narrow lines of yellow, the black bands glistened in the sun, fascinatingly sinuous. A narrowing of the bands on her sides, where they were separated by broad interstices of ground-color resembling an upright triangle, gave her a weird effect. On the rear portion of her body the bands broke into blotches in a series down her back, alternating with another down each side. And as the snake moved in sweeping waves through the water, her abdomen was exposed, anon, in brilliant, iridescent red and black spots.

Slipping over the surface of the creek, the female water snake held her head high out of the water as if to better her attempt to pierce the gloom beneath the cascade of dry grass; ready at the slightest alarm to dive below; ready to shoot like a sunbeam at an unsuspecting toad, should one present himself along the way.

In spite of her beautiful colors, the furtive, glittering eyes, tiny sparks of burning metal, gave the serpent a sinister aspect which threw fear into the hearts of the amphibious inhabitants and caused them to cringe farther back in their dens as she passed; they knew from past experience that the brown-banded moccasin was possessed of lightning speed and a savage temper, backed by a furious fighting strength. Her somber dress, when dry or coated with mud to deceive them, inspired fear and hatred in the hearts of all the amphibious and terrestrial tribes in that region.

Her remarkable ability to flatten her head and half of her body into a thin, broad ribbon of living flesh and bone struck the frogs, toads, mice, birds and other semi-terrestrial creatures with a palsying panic of dread chilling the courage of some who were redoubtable fighters. If anything were lacking in their fright, the big moccasin had only to emit one of her shrill hisses, like the sound of high-pressure steam.

PERHAPS a hundred feet upstream, the brown moccasin suddenly shot like a flash of red light, as straight as an arrow propelled by a powerful bow, across the creek, through the shallows, beneath the grass drapery and up on the narrow mud-flat at the foot of the crumbling bank, carrying in her distended jaws the dripping, flopping body of a large sun perch. Here was food for her and food for the youngsters, aplenty!

With the still quivering fish tightly gripped in her needle fangs, the serpent crawled awkwardly over the mud-flat and up through the grass-roots to where the babies were hidden.

to the nest wherein she had left her family two hours ago.

But all was not well at home; even before she attained the sandy retreat, the brown moccasin sensed something wrong and wriggled desperately through the tangled undergrowth, still holding the partly swallowed perch. The sibilant rustling of her tail as it switched the dead leaves spread a tense, ominous atmosphere through the surrounding jungle. A huge beetle ceased his labors; with staring eyes a gray field mouse scampered hastily away; a speeding kingfisher sent down a raucous note of derision; the dazzling blue dragon-fly skimmed the tops of the grass and weeds on soundless wings, but evidently watchful.

In the stiff sand adjoining the snake nest were innumerable footprints that told the story only too well; they said as plainly as if they had spoken that a large blue heron had feasted there, carefully picking and choosing according to his fancy.

At least half of the baby moccasins were gone completely; not more than a score remained, crawling aimlessly around the little hollow that had been their home. These seemed distraught and knew not which way to turn. The mother took in the situation at a glance, for this was not the first time that such a thing had happened to her household.

Without more ado she gulped furiously at the partially engulfed sunfish until the last of it had passed in a swollen lump through the narrows of her neck. No thought of feeding the family now; only to get away with them to some other locality as quickly as possible. As soon as the task was finished, the anxious mother set about swallowing the young moccasins, one at a time in rapid succession; in fact, so great was their anxiety to reach a place of safety that the little fellows could not wait their turns but crawled, two and three at a time, down the constricting throat of their mother. This had always been their custom when terrible danger hovered near, or when the parent had decided it was moving day.

When the last youngster was stowed away, the female moccasin, heavy with babies, slipped through the grass and literally fell down the eroded bank behind the dense fringe of slough-grass. Without pausing, she threw herself out into the open waters of the sun-scorched creek, where she turned her head down stream. She swam slowly, ungracefully, with never a backward glance to the scene of her multiple tragedy. Nor did her undulating sides present the attractive picture they had when she arrived. The life-filled pouch stretched the beautiful designs of her banded brown coat into grotesque, irregular shapes and almost colorless splotches.

FOR a mile, the laden snake swam and floated, drifted and swam, by jutting sand-bars, around slow bends past other sections of grass-fringed banks. And here the same deference was granted her by the inhabitants of the region; they moved aside and permitted her to pass unquestioned, content merely to stare stolid-eyed after her.

As she floated, the brown moccasin kept her eyes roving from bank to bank in search of a place that suited her. At last she turned in at the foot of a long slope parallel to the stream and leading to a high bank overlooking the water. With much difficulty she managed to climb out upon the muddy ledge, and laboriously she made her way up the long slope.

Below lay a deep, circular pool of midnight blackness in the shade of a huge weeping-willow. High above, a startled jay screamed sarcastically. To the back, a careful rustling in the rank growth of willow sprouts indicated that some creature was cautiously withdrawing from the neigh-

borhood. Here the tired mother snake would be fairly safe; from here she could make an instant, long dive to the depths of the pool if it became necessary to flee from terrestrial attack; and far enough from the water to be safe from amphibious enemies. Here she could disgorge her young and clean them with sundry wipings and coiling embraces.

But before the disgorging process was well under way the brown moccasin reared her flattening head in hissing anger. A peculiar, nauseating scent had been wafted to her, faint and indefinite as to source and proximity. She could not tell yet whether to fight or to flee. To be on the safe side she merely waited in silence, prepared for either event. The emanator of the odor was either a deadly enemy or food.

Soon a vigorous stirring in the dead vegetation above and beyond her caused the brown moccasin to whirl quickly in that direction.

Out of the grass and leaves squirmed a waddling, sleek, slimy creature all mottled with bright yellow spots on a satiny hide. His frog-like snout and round eyes instantly branded him harmless to the tautening snake; in fact a certain air of helplessness enveloped him. His stubby fingers, destitute of claw or talon, marked him an easy victim to a determined enemy.

He ambled forth stupidly. Cocking his bright, innocent eyes first to one side, then to the other, he approached the slowly-coiling serpent good-naturedly and with an apparent desire to be friendly.

The brown moccasin lowered her head, while a simulated guilelessness seemed to envelop her. She lay perfectly quiet and watched the simple-minded intruder approach. Such an ignorant fellow! Such trusting simplicity! Why should she fear him?

As he approached, a sinister tautening of her muscular body should have warned him of impending danger But the mud puppy was so trustful and innocent; he meant harm to no one and therefore thought that no one meant harm to him.

With all of his innocence, the size and shape of the salamander denoted his age as being past the inexperienced stage; it had been two years since he had ceased to live entirely in the water and had taken to blundering around in the damp, soggy places of the earth, eating nothing more exciting than flies, beetles, moths and other small insects. His experience with danger had been manifold and he should have known better than to waddle deliberately into this deadly peril, with his eyes open, as it were.

Like the common toad, the *salamandria urodela* is as harmless as he is ugly. His only method of defense is floundering. Having no teeth or fangs, he takes his food with a long, glutinous tongue which he ejects from his mouth with incredible swiftness to engulf the insect victim. It seems these could avail him not in a life and death struggle with a powerful serpent.

The brown moccasin merely waited for the salamander to approach within easy striking distance; no glint of mercy in her hypnotic stare or flickering black tongue.

The afternoon shadows were growing longer, and a bright blue snake doctor circled above the twain like an omen, a silent witness to the coming tragedy.

The open jaws of the savage snake shot out and closed over the mud puppy's head before he realized the significance of the vibrant hiss that accompanied the action. A moment he lay in passive surprize, apparently acceding to the sucking contortions of the snake.

But the salamander was not such an easy victim after all. His thick forelegs spread wide apart in stubborn resistance to the sucking jerks of the

self-enraged reptile. All her efforts seemed useless in swallowing him farther than his braced shoulders. Nor was the serpent, with all her sinuous strategy, able to force those strong legs back along the spotted body far enough to make swallowing easy.

In fact, the puppy would, at times, momentarily succeed in almost tearing himself loose from the slimy cavern engulfing him; by hooking his stout toes in the corners of the snake's mouth and then lunging mightily he would nearly escape, only to lose his hold and feel the savage gulps sucking him inward again.

Unable to see, and lacerated with intense pain, the yellow-spotted creature battled nobly for his life, in utter silence save for the threshing of dry grass and dead leaves.

AND so the battle raged for an hour or more, stirring up a miniature cyclone of leaves, grass and mud. It could have been likened unto a mad fight between mighty jungle beasts, where trees, shrubbery and rank jungle-grass are torn up by the roots or trodden under foot. For yards along the creek bank the two desperate creatures matted the ground vegetation. Sometimes the salamander would drag the snake. Then the snake would drag the salamander back a yard or so with vicious, jerky writhings, only to find her strength spent and feel that she was in turn being yanked and tugged in the opposite direction; with his four stubby feet braced and his powerful tail hooked around the grass roots, the pain-maddened and fear-maddened puppy would slash the serpent along an inch at a time, meanwhile unintentionally permitting her to recuperate her waning strength.

The brown moccasin sickened of the thing. She endeavored to disgorge the threshing incubus that was overwhelming her; perhaps the squirming protests within warned her to desist. She was more than willing to comply, but, too late, she found herself unable to extricate her needle fangs from the tough skin and bone of the puppy's neck. Desperately she retched and pried. Savagely she wrenched and twisted. Desperately she flopped. But all to no avail: the serpent was securely snared in her own trap.

Then, with a last terrific backward lunge, the now thoroughly terrified water snake tore the salamander loose from his desperate foothold and threw him with herself far out over the stagnant pool at the foot of the embankment. Over and over they fell, to light with a threshing splash in the shaded waters, where their writhings notified the scavengers of the stream that a feast would soon be waiting.

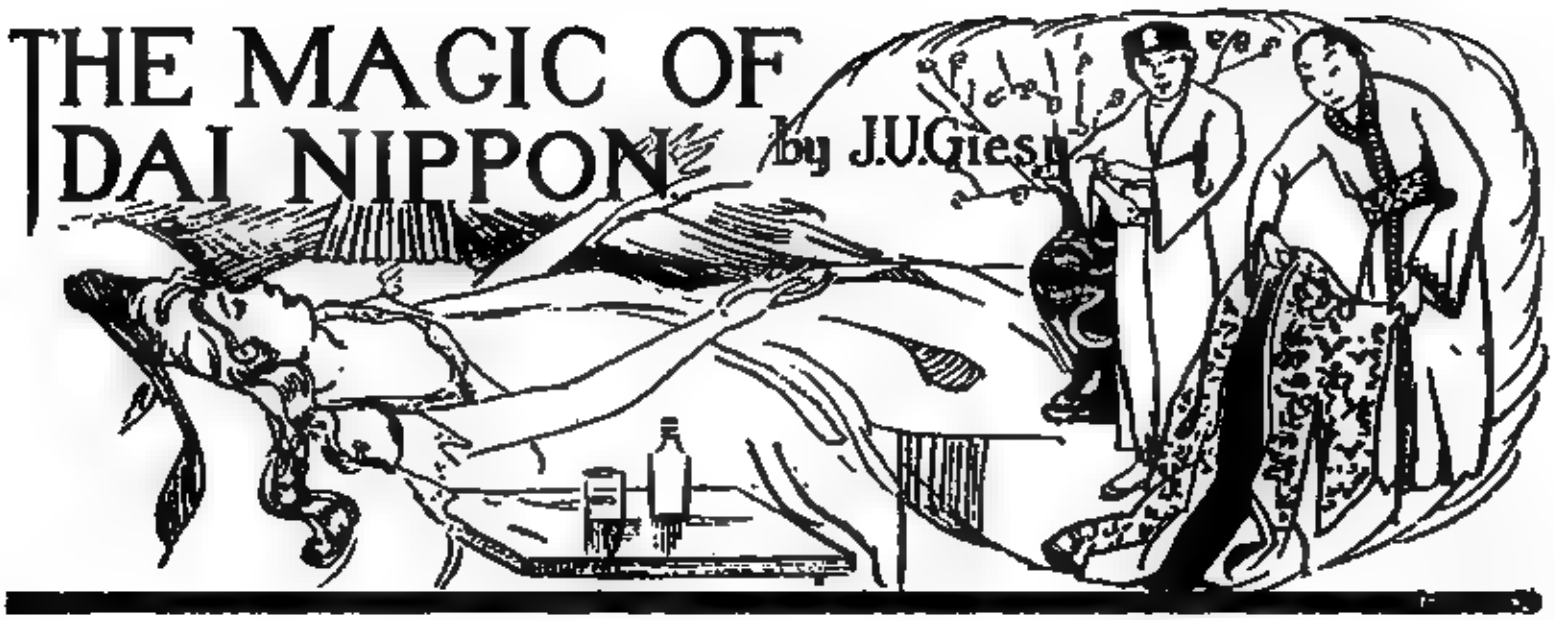
With uncanny instinct the great, armored alligator turtle was already standing by, with hooked jaws agape and ready to obey the unwritten mandates of talion. A score of brilliant dragonflies swiftly circled the pool as if distraught, and an army of bead-eyed crawfish rapidly marshaled their forces.

Clusters of silver-laced bubbles leaped to the surface of the darkening water. Then the water assumed again its placid serenity.

IT IS said that no note of comedy ever leavens the events of wild life. But whether this is true or not, a very fat opossum, who had watched the ill-fated battle, curled his bewhiskered lips back in an unmistakably broad grin when he saw an extremely exhausted little salamander drag himself wearily out of the water and sink with drooping eyes upon the point of a sand-bar. Around his neck, like a ruffled collar, he wore the mutilated jaws of the brown moccasin. And the opossum knew that the armored alligator turtle had obeyed one of nature's immutable laws.

THE MAGIC OF DAI NIPPON

by J.U.Giesy



FIRST let me verbally paint the picture, create mentally, if I may, the atmosphere of the room in Edwin Salen's home.

It was large—surprizingly large for a bedroom—so large that there was almost a hint of the feudal about it—so large that the corners were shrouded in the velvet of shadows, slinking along its walls in impalpable nebulæ of gloom.

Not that it was gloomy—it was ordinarily light, airy, a work of interior decorative art, as exquisite in its settings as the chamber of some magnificent, rosily lined casket constructed for the keeping of a rare and priceless gem—as indeed one may presume it was in Salen's mind.

That Salen had married late in life was due to the vague wanderlust that had kept him a virtual expatriate for years, had sent him prowling into the strange places of the earth, foot-loose and alone.

Yet, when he returned at length to his native shores and met the major passion of his life, he knew it, and he had prepared his house for her reception, making the heart of all its many beauties this room.

There was a touch of his other years about it, a subtle blending of oriental and occidental things. It showed in the long, many-paned French windows, in effect not unlike the native houses of Nippon, with their smoothly sliding screens; in the paneling of the walls with silken fabrics in softly harmonious tones, many of them indeed works of oriental artistry, such as may be found in the *shoji* of some *shozoku*—the dwelling of some patrician of Japan—things exquisitely painted or embroidered, with sprays of plum and cherry blossom, gorgeous in their glowing beauty, yet as delicate as the impress left on the tissue of a brain by some half-remembered dream.

It was furnished in a gray wood, as soothing to the eye, as soft in its clear grain, as the silk of the decorative panels: bed, dressing table, chairs, a chest of drawers. And the rug on the floor was rose—a thing the color of morning, or the heart of a delicate sea shell.

Such is the background of the picture, to be washed over by a half veil of shadow, before the foreground is drawn.

Those shadows must lurk in the corners deeply, must creep out toward the rays of a single half-screened light, close by the bed, in which is a woman's form. She is a blond, with a certain beauty that, as one can feel at a glance, is in harmony with the appointments of the room.

Two other figures now, and the picture is done.

First, that of a second woman, white-clad, with a hint of crisp stiff-

ness in her garments and the cap on her head: a nurse, the vigilant night watcher of modern civilized life, which is assailed by sickness.

Second, that of a man, tall even in his seated posture, dark-haired; a watcher also, with a face which his watching and the necessity for it has left strangely drawn: Edwin Salen, watching the features of the woman's head on the pillow out of dark eyes, the expression of which is strained.

That, then, is the picture, if you can see it; the screened glow of the electrolier highlighting it, diverted from the eyes of the sleeper, falling vividly upon the nurse's garments, striking upon the face of Edwin Salen and playing with its haggard lines.

HE HAD sat there for many hours, as on many other nights and days, ever since Laura had grown seriously ill. He had crept silently into this room of airy lightness, where now the shadows lurked.

At first he had come with a certain confidence that this was no more than a temporary need, that ere long medical skill and careful nursing would turn back the creeping tide of weakness that had suddenly assailed her life.

But of late he had come with a growing dread of impending disaster, and sat and watched as now he was watching, very much as one might watch the flickering of a single candle in momentary danger of being blown utterly out.

The thing had come unexpectedly upon her. What physicians he had summoned had spoken learnedly to him, something of vital forces and their functioning—things he but half understood. It was the harder for him to understand, because he and Laura had been happy; the crowning glory of that happiness had seemed the hour in which he had known that she was to become the mother of his child.

And now—Edwin Salen was afraid. The thing showed in the set lines of his mouth, the tension at the corners of his eyes, as he turned them now and then from the face on the pillow toward the shadows beyond it. Tonight he had almost the feeling that those shadows were like wolves just beyond the circle of some firelight, waiting—waiting to creep close.

He was tired, worn in mind and body, yet he felt that he must not close his eyes, even though the nurse had urged him tonight, as on the night before it, to seek his bed. In the past days he had taken intervals of rest, of course. He had crept to his own room and thrown himself down for a few brief hours of sleep. At such times, Yamato, his Japanese valet, had worked over him with a skillful touch, applying to his weary body those tricks of massage that seemed always to revivify it in some strange manner and endow it with at least a temporary renewal of strength. The man had come to him shortly after he had met Laura, and had been invaluable to him in many ways, but in none more so than in the present crisis of his life.

Abruptly he stiffened, at the faintest sound of movement from the bed.

Laura had turned her head, and she was smiling.

He leaned a little forward, with his hot, tired eyes upon her lips.

The lips parted. "Beautiful—oh—so very beautiful!" they framed barely audible words.

The nurse rose, and stood regarding the sleeper. Salen sat watching.

Laura Salen's brows contracted slightly. The smile faded. Her eyes opened.

"Ed!"

He reached her swiftly, bent above her.

"Yes, dear—what is it?"

"I want them—oh, Ed, I want them!"

"What, dear?"

"The—the beautiful—flowers."

Her utterance was that of one but half wakened, and suddenly she broke off. A light of fuller understanding came into her expression.

"I—I was asleep, Ed, and—I dreamed—such a strange dream. Send away the nurse."

"But—Laura."

The man glanced at the white garbed attendant as he began his protest.

"Please—"

"Could you—" Salen began.

"Certainly." The nurse inclined her head slightly. "I shall remain just outside the door."

Laura Salen watched her going, and brought her glance back to her husband.

"Draw up your chair, dear; sit down—hold my hand. You—you held it in my dream. Poor Ed—you look tired."

"I'm all right." He denied the imputation of his physical fag almost bruskly, drew up the chair he had left, and sat down with her hand in his. "Now then, what is it, sweetheart?"

"The kimono—"

"The kimono?"

"Yes." She kept her eyes upon him. "Oh, the most beautiful—beautiful thing—I have ever seen—in my life! I—I don't know where it was or how we got there—one never does in dreams. And I know it was a dream now, dear, though it all seemed so real, when I waked. I've never seen anything like it, myself, but I think it must have been like some of the places of which you have told me—places you've been before we met. But this time we were together, and we reached this place, as it seemed, up a long, gradual ascent; and there were little islands, and funny little houses, set among trees upon them, and clear blue water; and it was all very lovely, just as it ought to be, dear, in a dream. And then, after a time, I hardly noticed how, we were in a room. It was a very wonderful place, with gray walls, trimmed in the most exquisite panels. It—it was somewhat like this room of mine, and yet it was not; and there were several men, but, except for them and you and me, there was no one in the place. They bowed to us, holding their hands clasped one on the other as Yamato always does, and they began showing me kimonos. It—it sounds silly, doesn't it, dear?"

"Go on," said Salen, compelling his lips to smile. "There was one you admired—with flowers? You said something about wanting the flowers, when you waked."

"Did I?"

She lay silent for a minute.

"Yes, dear; they showed me one I admired very, very much. That was the strange part of my dream, Ed. They showed me dozens upon dozens. They were like a wilderness of embroidered flowers, inhabited by a multitude of butterflies and birds. But there was only one that seemed something I simply couldn't do without. And the instant I saw it, I forgot all about the rest. I saw them, of course, but beside the other they were to me as if they were not there. Did you ever feel that way about anything, Ed?"

Salen nodded and compressed his lips.

"Yes. It was like that when I first saw you, Laura. All other women ceased for me in that moment to exist."

"Ed!"

Her eyes widened swiftly, grew dark.

"Oh, Ed—dear!"

Her fingers quivered, curled slightly inside his.

"I—I wish I could describe it so you could see it," she went on after a little pause. "It was so beautiful, that when I saw it, I thought I put out my hands to take it up. But one of the men prevented my doing so, and there seemed to be a sort of horror in his eyes, and those of the rest. They spoke among themselves softly. I couldn't understand what they said, but in some way I seemed to know they were speaking about me, my appearance, my eyes and hair. And then the man who had kept me from touching it turned and bowed and spoke to me directly:

" 'It is for me to tell the honorable lady that this toward which she has put out her hand is the kimono of—death!' "

"The kimono of—death?" Salen repeated in a voice as sharply rasping as the rustle of dead leaves, and broke off with a sibilant intake of breath.

"Yes."

Laura Salen's eyes dwelt upon him, and in their depths was the light of a great love.

"And it struck me as very odd, and I asked him what he meant. He told me that what he had said was true, that if one were so strongly attracted to it that she desire to wear it, and did so—that one died.

"And then I asked him why, if that were true, it should have been made such a beautiful, beautiful thing.

"He bowed low again, still with his hands crossed, and he said: 'Because, honorable lady, there are times when death is the most beautiful thing in life, as when one is very tired—or to live would mean a great sorrow.' And there was something in the way he said it, which, despite the strangeness of his words themselves, made me feel as if they might be true.

"So I asked him why, if to put on the kimono would mean death, he had shown it to me, and he answered:

" 'Because, augustness, it is yours to choose. For when the time of dying comes, there shall be brought forth the death robe, and it were not our part to name the hour wherein it shall be put on or refused.'

"And it was then, Ed, that you took my hand and held it, and I looked at you and smiled. And I think I spoke your name, and opened my eyes, and found you bending over me, and looked up into your face and told you I wanted the beautiful flowers, I suppose. It was a strange dream, wasn't it, dear?"

"Yes," said Edwin Salen in a husky whisper.

"And—it was such a beautiful, beautiful robe! I'm glad it was only a dream, dear. It would have been hard to leave it—to go away and leave it, in real life."

"Laura!" Salen's voice quivered like a taut string. "But—you did leave it, dearest?—you made your choice?"

"Yes, dear, I—made my choice," she said slowly. "But it was strange—what he said about death being the most beautiful thing in life. Do you suppose I dreamed that because I've been sick so long?—because I'm tired?"

"Perhaps." Salen's tone was throaty with emotion. "Don't think any more about it. Try and go to sleep again, and—rest."

"You, too," she suggested. "You're worn out with all the watching."

"Tomorrow," said Salen.

She closed her eyes. After a time her breathing told him that she slept.

He drew back his chair slightly and again took up his vigil.

By-and-by the nurse, no longer hearing voices, returned on tiptoe, but he did not move.

THE kimono of death. Salen was not superstitious, though he knew many superstitions. Yet now as he

sat there he found himself dwelling on the words. The kimono of death. Why had she dreamed of such a garment—a thing so beautiful that it made its putting on or leaving off a matter of choice? Why, by what thing or complex of things, had the dream been inspired? He tried to piece it out in the cold measure of analytical reason. She had said she was tired. His heart quivered; his throat took on a dull ache. She might well be that, but was that it? Perhaps, as he had agreed with her before she fell again asleep, it had been a contributing cause. She had said the dream place had been not unlike her own room. He had told her many, many things of his wanderings before their marriage. That had no doubt helped out. Then, too, she could scarcely have failed to catch the note of watchful waiting that had characterized the nights and days, the gravely quiet attitude of the physicians, the twelve-hour change in nurses, his own presence there beside her, so very, very often, when, as tonight, she had waked. Those things had possibly furnished the motive of death—this grim and ceaseless battle wherein so much depended upon what he had once heard called "the will to live," upon her own desire to go on living. A tremor shook him like a heavy chill. She had said she was tired. What if—? He held back his own breathing behind suddenly tight-locked teeth, sitting forward in order to hear her breathe.

The rhythm of it came to him in regular reassurance. He leaned back. That was nonsense—the result of jangled nerves. Tomorrow, as he had promised, he would have Yamato give him a rub, and sleep for a few hours, and be a new man. Only now it was odd how silent everything had become. It was odd how loud the whisper of her breathing ran through the room. It was odd how the shadows beyond the lamplight seemed trying to press in. It was an odd dream—odd how the fellow had said that in all life death might come to appear the most beautiful thing. That was symbolism, the uncanny, indirect means of expression so much in vogue in the Orient. It was odd how she had managed to get it into her dream—to catch the full flavor of it. It meant—well, it meant that the most beautiful thing in life might come to be its end—the most desired, the most wished for. It—it might be like that with him if—Laura were gone. He turned dull eyes toward the nurse.

She sat motionless, with folded hands.

"Beautiful—"

He started. Laura had spoken, and now as he sat up sharply, yet without sound, she spoke again:

"Beautiful—the most beautiful thing—in life."

Salen lifted himself to his feet with a single unwrithing movement. He knew—he understood, that she was dreaming the thing again. She was dreaming it—and—

As the nurse rose, he reached the bed.

"Laura," he voiced her name tensely, yet softly. "Laura."

She did not answer. There was a strange, intent expression creeping across her face.

"Laura!"

Watching that growing rapture, it came to Salen that he must wake her—rouse her, bring her back to a realization of his presence there beside her—to a realization of—life.

"Laura!"

He touched her.

"Give it—to me!"

As if his touch had but served to bring the climax, she lifted herself, sat up. Her arms rose, stretched out. Her eyes, wide, unseeing, seemed yet staring at something invisible, intangible to any save herself. They were

lighted by an odd fire of yearning. And the odd, ineffable glow of pleasure had set its seal fully upon her features.

"Laura! Laura!"

Salen was shaking, shaking, his whole form quivering with the tremor of a strong man's fear.

"Ah-h!"

A sigh of supreme satisfaction.

"Laura!"

He threw every atom of driving power his soul possessed into the word. It came strangled, gasping. He was like one battling to the last degree of resistance against some overwhelming, sensed, but unseen force.

She smiled—swayed.

He caught her—lowered her to the pillow. This was the end, and he knew it. Everything had depended upon his ability to wake her—and he had failed. She had dreamed again, and —the dream had carried farther. . .

"God!"

Salen stood up. He stared about him—at the close pressing shadows, at the white face of the nurse, and turned his eyes back to the smiling lips of his wife. The kimono of death! She had found it and put it on. She was dead.

And suddenly he turned and went toward the door of the room and through it into the hallway, staggering, stumbling, in drunken fashion.

"Yamato! Yamato!" he called.

ODDLY enough, though Salen took no heed of the fact at the time, the Japanese almost instantly appeared.

He paused, and stood bowing, with hands clasped one upon the other in front of his body.

"You call, sair. The honorable lady—she have put on the kimono of death?"

"Eh?"

It was a grunting, inarticulate exclamation. Salen jerked himself up, lurching on uncertain feet. He stood staring at the man before him, swaying slightly.

"What's that?" he said after a moment, thickly, in the other's tongue.

"The august lady could not resist the beauty of the garment?" Yamato suggested softly, and paused with a hissing intake of breath between tight set, half bared teeth.

Salen's mouth sagged open without sound. His eyes widened. With no other warning, he lunged forward, with clutching, outstretched, clawlike hands.

"What d'ye mean?"

His words leaped, a throaty rumble, in almost bestial menace.

"What d'ye know about it? Answer me, or—"

He found his arms caught in a strangely compelling grip. Yamato had not given back. His fingers dug into the flesh through Salen's garments.

"The magic of Dai Nippon," he said. "Revenge, honorable master."

There was a taunting devil in his eyes.

"Revenge?"

To Salen the world was crashing into chaos. He stood staring dazedly into the face of the man who held him. Weird half thoughts seemed struggling for a fuller birth in his tired brain, but—he could not understand. To his morbid fancy, Yamato's visage became that of a devil mask, the face of a gloating fiend. Laura was dead, and this imp of hell had some part in it, knew something about it. He struggled.

Torturing pains shot up his arms and numbed them. He groaned—relaxed.

"Yes, honorable master, for sometimes the greater revenge is not to take life, but to spare it, robbing it of its greatest treasure, that it may know its loss is but the fruit of its own misdeeds. Wherefore on the afternoon before the night before this, I crept into the room of the night nurse, and

whispered to her things in her sleep, to the end that last night she slept without knowing that she did so, for a certain hour, and that before that she induced the honorable master to sleep also for a time. And in that hour, I, Yamato, stole in to the honorable lady and whispered to her mind the story of a dream. Yet such was my plan and my magic that she woke and told the honorable one about it, before she dreamed again—"

"You—you hypnotized her?" Salen babbled. "You hypnotized her and the nurse, you—"

Yamato smiled slightly.

"The magic of Dai Nippon may do strange things to the brain, honorable master. I waited until she was tired with much sickness, until death had come to seem to her no more a thing to be dreaded."

"You—"

Salen regarded him dully.

"Has the honorable one forgotten the tea girl in the House of a Hundred Steps, at Yokohama?"

Yamato released him.

Salen caught a deep breath into his lungs.

"Gorei—the tea girl," he stammered!

"My sister. I have followed."

"To do murder!"

"To steal, as you stole, what may not be returned again, honorable Salen. The august lady gained what she most desired."

Sweat dewed Salen's forehead. He stared at his formerly devoted servant as a man may stare at Nemesis—the concrete materialization of some past crime. His numbed hands dangled impotently at his sides.

"You—killed her," he said at last, thickly. "You killed her—you yellow fiend."

"Perhaps—but the magic of Dai Nippon leaves small proof behind it."

Yamato folded his arms.

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WANDERLUST BY PROXY

by Will Smith

DR. GRAY shook his head.

"I don't understand it at all. Physically, the man is perfectly all right. If he would just let us take that contraption off his head—"

He turned to the wasted figure on the bed and again cautiously stretched forth a hand. But, as before, the instant his fingertips touched the queer helmet the old man slatted violently away.

"I told you, sir," quavered a servant. "Mr. Krieg has said time and again that the thing must never, under any circumstances, be removed except by himself. Our regular doctor and I started to take it off once a few years ago when master had a spell 'most as violent as this, and he became terribly angry. He made us promise not to try it again, ever."

"But what kind of a thing is it, anyway? Why has he lain here all these years with it on his head? What's it for? Didn't he ever tell you?"

"Oh, no, sir. He has guarded its secret very carefully. I don't know what it's for, but between you and me, sir, I have an idea. I think it's something that might be a blessing to anyone bedridden almost all his life, like master. It's something that makes him dream, and see and hear things; that's what it is!"

"Bosh!"

"Why, he lies there a-wearing that dingus, sir, and going through the funniest actions imaginable. Of course he can't move very much, but he has managed to worm himself all over that bed, a-hollering sometimes, with his face working with every possible emotion, just like a person's at the movies."

"Does he keep it on every minute?"

"When he first began to use it, Mr. Krieg wore the headgear only through the day, taking it off at night when he slept. Then he got to sleeping days and lying awake with it nights. But it wasn't long before he began to leave it on day and night for weeks at a time, sleeping at all sorts of odd hours. Soon he got so far gone in the habit, or whatever it is, that he refused to take the apparatus off at all. It must be five years now since any of us has seen any more of master's face than just the lower half. Why, sir, I've forgotten what color his eyes are!

"Though never so bad as this one, he has had awful spells many times in the past. I don't know, sir; I—I don't hardly want to take that dome off him. You know he may get over

it as he has before. I think we'd better wait as long as we possibly dare to."

The doctor shrugged helplessly and sat down, and the little gathering of servants sighed and wrung their hands. The vigil went on.

It was evident to the physician that the man's sufferings must soon be over. His struggles and paroxysms of strangled coughing were fast growing weaker and of shorter duration. Now the tense lines of the face, or what could be seen of it, would relax as if from exhaustion, and then the features would draw again into a hideous mask of agony. At such times the body would writhe "like an eel on a griddle," as the cook had expressed it, and there would issue from between the tightly clenched teeth quivering, groaning curses. At last there came a long period of passive silence, broken only by the sufferer's choking, stertorous breathing. This now sank to a barely audible murmur; life was nearly spent.

"That damned thing on his head! That's what's killing him," cried Gray, leaping up. "I'm going to have it off him!"

But he was too late to save Krieg's life. The old man had suddenly heaved his body into a weird contortion, head half raised from the pillows, and as the doctor reached him he uttered a last, sighing moan, "the black devils," and fell back.

"Now we shall see," grated Gray.

With one motion he swept the domelike thing from the dead man's brow and clamped it on to his own. At once he broke into a spasm of coughing. With a horrified shriek he tore the thing from his head and hurled it to the floor. It smashed to bits and lay a tangled, broken mass!

"What devil's contrivance is that!"

The gasping doctor kicked and stamped on the wrecked machine.

"See and hear things! My God, it's worse than that! I saw a circle of blazing brands and embers around me. Smoke parched my lungs! I heard the beating of drums and the yells of dancing, naked savages!"

I

WANTED: A man 65 years of age, 5 feet 6 inches tall, weighing 130 pounds; having sandy-gray hair, blue eyes—in short, a man resembling as nearly as possible the undersigned. *Must* have about the same temperament. Lucrative position for one fond of travel. Apply in person. THADDEUS KRIEG, 1236 Mountain Avenue.

APPLY in person they had! There had come seemingly millions of men, of all ages, dimensions, complexions and temperaments, alike only in their appreciation of the word "lucrative". Old Thaddeus had had some difficulty in selecting his man, but he had achieved a result that he felt was well worth all his trouble. As he now looked up from his pillow he regarded a face and form almost exactly like his own.

"Huh! It's like looking in a mirror," he grunted. "Now, Mr. Bakke, if you will try not to interrupt me, I will begin at the beginning and tell you all about it.

"You see in me a man who has from childhood been afflicted, or blessed, with a craving for adventure and travel. Wanderlust! Liverpool, Singapore, Copenhagen, Bangkok, the Indies, East and West! What pictures those words have always brought to my mind! Do they mean anything to you?"

"Do they? Why, Mr. Krieg, I—I too—"

"Yes! Surely. We have already agreed that our likes and dislikes are identical. Well, well; that's fine.

"Now then. Just supposing that you, realizing by the time you had reached your lonely, orphaned teens that you could never be happy until you had tasted life in all those wonderful places, and yet being financially unable to—"

"I know."

"Of course. Well, realizing all this, suppose you had set yourself to applying every atom of your strength, every thought of your brain, and almost every second of your time, to the accomplishment of that end. Suppose that by twenty years of age you had at last wrought by such heroic means a neat little fortune and had your goal in sight. Suppose, however, that you kept going at top pressure right up to the last minute, relaxing only when you held in your hand the very steamship tickets to—Savu!"

Bakke's eyes glistened, as had Krieg's. But now the old man fixed upon his companion an almost accusing, stabbing glare. In his excitement he strained toward the man as he thundered on:

"Then suppose you were stricken with paralysis! Right on the pier, sir, before I could board that dream ship of mine, I tumbled over, and they carted me back home."

The invalid fell back on his pillows. The memory of that hour of his staggering disappointment overwhelmed him.

"They said it was the too sudden relaxing from the key to which I had been keeping myself strung. Whatever it was, I became in an instant the helpless thing you see now. Forty-five years I have lain here, with nothing to do but watch that little fortune increase itself, and to think.

"But even then I did not give up; such is the power of an all-consuming desire! As I lay here helpless, thwarted, the craving grew on me—grew until it became almost a tangible thing. I had nothing but my thoughts, but I wondered if, from those same ever-present, never-interrupted thoughts, I could not produce something of use to me.

"And I have! Out of the abnormally active brain of a perforce inactive body I have evolved that which will win me my heart's desire. I shall die a happy man!

"I have forgotten to say that I had made my little stake by experimenting with electricity. Electricity, you know, was young in those days. Lying here in bed I began to look to the new science for my liberation, and in my mind I continued day after day my experiments.

"Wireless telegraphy? Bah—child's play! I thought that all out forty years ago. Now they are playing with wireless telephony. That's merely a step, in the right direction to be sure. I wonder when they will stumble upon wireless photography. I have gone far, far beyond even that!

"The trouble with your experimenters of today is that they are using too much junk. Apparently they have lost sight of the fact that wireless waves—radio waves, as they are beginning to call them—are delicate affairs. They try to drive straws through a safe by forcing those weak radio waves through all manner of complicated rigs—and then expect them to amount to something. They have missed altogether a simple little principle that came to me here years ago, which would allow them to scrap their cumbersome present-day apparatus, lock, stock and barrel. Modern experimenters are using an elephant to transport a pea. Why, I could tell them things that—but no matter, I don't care to let my secret out. I intend to enjoy it for myself."

KRIEG summoned a servant and gave him a low-toned order. Presently the man returned, bearing a rather queer-looking set of goggles and a thing that resembled as much as anything else the upper section of a diver's helmet.

"Thank you, Perkins; that's all. Mr. Bakke, I had the parts for these things constructed by a dozen different men and fumbled those parts together

here myself. My secret is safe. Now before I go any farther I shall demonstrate to your satisfaction that I am not crazy. I want you to put on these goggles and look out a window. The lenses are only plain glass, and those two little screen-fronted boxes surmounting them won't obstruct your vision.

"Well, dear me, Mr. Bakke, you do look quite distinguished in them. How do I look?"

Krieg was settling the helmet over his own head. It completely covered his ears and eyes, and even part of his nose. Imagine Bakke's astonishment then, when the old man continued: "Well, you certainly have the advantage over me. I look far from distinguished—a little bit simple, I fear. Are you surprized? My dear sir, I see myself perfectly. In fact, if you will step to the window, I shall prove that I can see everything you can!

"Let's see; you are at the window right behind my head, are you not? Um-m-m. There goes a laundry wagon—the South Chicago Wet Wash. Ha, Ha! Poor Bakke! Isn't that a pretty child there picking my dahlias? Oh, you frightened her away. But probably you are wearing a pretty frightful expression, eh? You know I can't see your face, or at least no more of it than the tip of your nose when I look down. Keep it well powdered, Bakke; don't let it get red on us!

"Do you know those goggles have ears, too? They have, and a sense of smell, too. I can hear the light tapping of that loose telephone wire outside the window, and I can smell the flowers on the stand under your nose—our nose, I might say. Yes, those goggles have three senses, all rolled into a single ray, and I could easily arrange two or maybe three senses more. But any additions are not essential to my purpose, and besides, they might make our little toys complicated."

Krieg removed the helmet.

"Well, Bakke; do you begin to get my idea?"

"I'm beginning to, yes," Bakke gasped. "But I don't believe I understand just why you chose me."

"I picked you because, since to all intents and purposes you are to be me, I want an exact replica of myself. And you are the man; you are like me physically and, more important still, mentally. You have the same thwarted desires. But now the world is bright for both of us. Mr. Bakke, I want you to take my name and wander where fancy leads.

"Carry my senses up and down the world!"

2

SAVU, in the South Seas! Soft, radiant moonlight on a blue-white strand; gentle lapping of waves; perfume of great, exotic blooms; hushed, sad-sweet strains of stringed instruments.

Krieg, by proxy, stood on a little eminence overlooking a tiny crescent of bay. Directly ahead lay the sea and the moon-path; to the left twinkled the fires of a native village, whence came an occasional faint bark of a dog or a gust of sensuous music; to the right stretched an expanse of beautiful, lightly swaying, feathery fronds. All his life the old man had longed for them, those ancient sirens of the lotus-eater. Palm trees by moonlight.

A slow, sobbing breath uplifted him, an exalted smile overspread his features; tears of sublime, long-deferred joy ran down his cheeks.

In a sunlit room in Chicago a puzzled servant wiped the moisture from a smiling, half concealed face.

The man in bed didn't care; let them think him crazy. He knew now what joy was to be his. In the past weeks he had had demonstrated over

and over that his device was all he had hoped, and more.

How he had thrilled on the cross-country trip from Chicago! Everything had imbued him with a grateful rapture—smiling fields glimpsed from car windows, great cities grown greater since that tragic trip of forty-odd years before, the jolly train companions. One of these had offered him a cigar, and he had been pleasantly amused to hear his proxy accept it with the exact words he himself would have used. It was a fragrant weed, and he had been somewhat embarrassed to find himself smoking and sucking away at nothing.

The sick man had hastily dispatched a servant for the duplicate of that cigar!

This was a trick he had soon caught —that of smoking, eating and sleeping when his proxy did. His attendants had quickly learned to interpret his different desires by observing his facial movements. This had eliminated the necessity of leaving his other self even for an instant.

His proxy—"Proxie," he called him—had been conscientious in never removing the goggles, not even to sleep. He had been careful, too, in observing his instructions not to dispel the illusion by speaking directly to Krieg except in a grave emergency. Krieg had appreciated the man's anxiety to know if the affair were really turning out satisfactorily.

Accordingly, as soon as he had seen Proxie registered—"Thaddeus Krieg"—at a San Francisco hotel, Krieg had dispatched to him there a telegram:

> "YOU SEE I HAVE YOU LOCATED APPARATUS ABSOLUTELY NOT AFFECTED BY DISTANCE SHALL NOT COMMUNICATE OFTEN DO AS FANCY DICTATES"

He had had the unique sensation a few minutes later of receiving and reading his telegram to himself, on the other end!

Krieg had passed a palpitating moment on the dock at San Francisco, gripped by an unreasoning fear that he would never get up that gangplank. But at last—glory be!—he had found himself comfortably established aboard. He heaved a sigh of happy relief.

Now the great ship had moved off on a voyage that, to a certain two men merging in one, had seemed the most wonderful voyage of all time.

It was when they had been a day or two at sea that Krieg had noticed an unforeseen quality of his invention. He had at first been inclined to regret the fact that he had not after all endowed his goggles with another sense or two. But he had decided he was wise in not having given them the sense of taste, for had he done so he should surely have starved in the illusion he was eating. And as for the sense of touch, of feeling—he had found that his immersion in the alter ego had been so complete that the sense had come of itself.

To the consternation of certain Chicago servants and doctors, both Kriegs had been violently seasick!

The weeks that followed had stirred Krieg—proxy and proper—to the depths of his being. Long, sunny days idled away on a gently lifting deck, sea-scented nights under new stars whose brilliance seemed a smiling welcome to a long expected guest; stormy times, when the spirit of the man grappled with the elements in response to a challenge long left unanswered.

He should never forget his sensations of this morning, when they had pointed out a cone-topped smudge lifting from a coppery sea and told him—that was Savu!

Why was it that this name, out of thousands that had thrilled him, had seemed the most desirable of them all, the one shining mark? Savu. Its very soft beauty of sound, with its freedom from any sudden harshness,

had somehow summed up all those cravings for a life of languidly wandering irresponsibility. And yet there had been more, indefinable, elusive.

THE man on the beach turned reluctantly from the dream-panorama before him and made his way slowly, as one who fears to awake from a heavenly sleep, toward the village. What should he encounter there? He knew not, and cared not. Whatever he met would be something very different from the numbing atmosphere of a rich man's sickroom. He joined in the wild revelry of the place with an unashamed abandon.

Unashamed?

Lie you, sir, in a bed; make yourself unable to stir; let your gold bring you all that money can offer. Now let nature supply you with an inexorable demand for lingering tastes of life in far countries, and let that demand feed and grow on your inactivity. Lie there ten years and ten again; double that and add more, realizing you have little more time on earth. Then, sir, suddenly given unlimited power to quaff it, confront yourself with brimming, raw, exotic *life!* You would be unashamed.

Toward morning when both Kriegs felt for the nonce surfeited with life's thrills and craved only a chance to drop into blissful oblivion, there came a revelation. It came in the form of a girl—a new, pure slip of a girl with dusky, flower-twined hair framing a flowerlike face—bending over Krieg and bathing his drink-fired temples with cool scented water. The instant Krieg's flame-shot eyes looked into the restful dark of hers, he knew.

This was the lure of Savu!

And yet, even in that exalted moment, the man became perplexed, unsatisfied. Somehow there came a feeling that something still deeper was here for him—as if the revelation had been but half complete. But let that pass; it was enough for now that this God-given moment was his.

The man and the girl were in the darkened entrance to a large thatched hut in the center of the clustered native dwellings. How they came there Krieg could never say. The sounds of revelry round about had subsided, leaving only the clean notes of nature. From near at hand could be heard a gentle stirring and rustling of fowl, and from a little distance came a mellow lowing and tinkling of belled cattle.

Dawn found the couple still there, the man with head pillowed in the girl's lap, peacefully sleeping. As he slept, the girl drew cool fingers slowly across his brow, cooing a soft-slurring South Sea melody.

When, near noon, Krieg awoke, the girl was nowhere in evidence. He found himself instead hemmed in by small black men. With a timid curiosity the savages were poking at the white man's queer goggles and exclaiming in their musical tongue.

Some of them Krieg recognized as jolly comrades of the night before. These grinned expansively when he spoke of the evening's doings, but looked scared and pretended not to understand when he asked about his beautiful companion of the early morning hours. At last Krieg lost patience and set off along the beach toward the white settlement.

Here he gained nothing by discreet inquiries among those of his race, they seeming indeed to hold a thinly veiled contempt for the little old white man interested in a young native girl. Nor did he find trace of her that day.

Next morning the wanderer sat at a little table in the shade of the broad hotel veranda sipping the cool, sirup-sweet coffee of the region. He was wondering absently how next to proceed, when he was electrified by a hearty, resounding whack between the shoulders. This thump, nearly dislodging the man's goggles, caused a

hectic few minutes in Chicago, where scared attendants contemplated another midnight call for the doctor. The thump, as it were, that was felt round the world!

Krieg recovered his wits in time to offer the fat man, who stood inanely pumping his hand, a place across the table. Removing a large cork helmet, the stranger oozed himself down and sat mopping his face and grinning fatly.

"Yes, sir," he puffed, "a real live American! I knew it the minute I laid eyes on you. Phew, it's hot! Whatever brings you to this hell-possessed place? But never mind talking, just sit and let me look at you; that's enough. I'm sick of seeing no one but these scheming Dutchmen and half-baked savages. Why, Mr.—— What name?"

In the cloud of talk Krieg found opening to insert the name, and then sat back and listened.

It seemed his visitor was a Mr. Johns, an itinerant trader who did business with the natives of the interior villages. He had evidently a wide acquaintance among the black people, and displayed so intimate a knowledge of their affairs that his listener at once found a new hope.

When Johns paused once for breath Krieg with some misgivings asked a few questions.

"Paali Pi-lang! Sure I know her. Dang pretty girl, too; and educated. They say she had a Spanish mother—a teacher for the government. Her old man sent Paali over here to Tula for a while to the missionary's school. He's well fixed, Papa Pi-lang is. Runs the dive across the bay there. You and I will have to drop over around the place some night, eh?

"But we won't see Miss Paali. No, sirree! The old boy keeps her well away from that joint. He's bringing her up good, and there's a good reason. He's got her all sold off to marry young Blwoma, the chief's son.

"Pi-lang has to watch the girl pretty close, because every time she looks crossways at a man her father gets in dutch. You see Blwoma is prince of a pretty tough gang up in the hills, and he just uses them whenever he gets a jealous fit to come down here and turn Pi-lang's place upside down. Of course they soon shake out Paali's feller and lug him back into the bush. They say Blwoma is pretty severe with the man they catch. Not one has ever come back, anyway."

Krieg shivered, while Johns, still mopping his brow, babbled on.

"And Pi-lang is especially careful these days, because the wedding is set for next month. That man Blwoma—"

But Krieg was not listening.

THE two Americans spent that very night at the native resort. Johns frankly glutting himself with pleasure as a palliative to weary days of travel and trade. Krieg for the most part sat alone at a little corner table sipping a light wine and hoping for an opportunity to talk with the proprietor, or by some chance even to glimpse his daughter. Once, early in the evening, the trader told Krieg the grizzled native looking at him so intently from across the room was Pi-lang himself, but when Krieg rose to approach him the old fellow slipped off out of sight. Several times as the night dragged on Krieg thought he felt that burning gaze fixed on him, but he saw the man no more.

As for the girl, it was as if she no longer existed.

It was nearly a week later that he saw her again; and, as is usual with such happenings, it came about quite simply.

The man was taking his customary late afternoon stroll in a little wood behind the town. Since the events of that memorable first night at Pi-lang's and the disappointment of the second, Krieg had lost interest in the

place, preferring this moody wandering along a softly sun-dappled trail.

Today he was even more melancholy than usual, finding only a bitter-sweet pang in all the lush, tropic beauty around him. He paused with a sudden light in his eye at the low grunt of a steamer rounding into the tiny harbor; then with a sad smile shook his head and went onward.

Now the path dropped into a little glade. Parting the branches Krieg brushed in, to bring himself up short. There, asleep at his feet, lay Paali Pilang!

What a picture of lovely pureness the leaf-softened sunlight described! The very frankness in which the girl's koa-colored beauty defied the stringy native costume to conceal it utterly, achieved an effect of noble innocence. Curled up like a kitten, dark-olive cheek on plump brown forearm, she suggested to Krieg a fragile wild creature that somehow cried out for his protection. Kneeling, he passed a reverent hand over the crown of rippling black hair.

Cold hands limply resting on a moon-bathed coverlid tingled at the touch.

Paali stirred slightly, and full, red lips parted in a little smile. Krieg caught a glimpse of small white teeth as yet unmutilated by savage custom, and then with a faint indrawn note of fright the girl sprang to her feet.

"Oh, oh! Oh, it's you! Paali been so tired. Went sleep waiting."

"Paali! How did you get here?"

"Papa sleep. Old woman get careless. Paali sneak out see if white-wizard-with-the-glasses love me!"

"Why, my child! I'm glad you did, but—love! You can't know what love is. And with an old fellow like me!"

"You not old. Paali think you just begin be young. Always look so pleased at things. Peek at you from house. Paali like see you smile and cry same time. Can do now?"

In spite of himself, Krieg uttered a foolish giggle. Then, before he could begin to recover from the depths of confusion this caused, he was completely confounded by the innocent question:

"Can kiss Paali? Like missionary school girls did. Please? Lots fun!"

She pursed the little mouth up to him provokingly.

"Child, child!"

Krieg backed away, to master the temptation. But he didn't back far; so Paali had only to extend her shapely arms to reach him and draw his not violently resisting head down to hers.

She neatly implanted a dewy kiss, while in a far-off sickroom commotion reigned!

Krieg's first surge of joy gave way quickly to a suffusion of shame. He, old, and a man of the world; and she an innocent, untutored child! What was he doing?

But even this latter disgust was gone when he felt her form shaking with sobs, his shoulder wet with tears. The old sense of a protector returned as, his fingers under a quivering dimpled chin, he gently raised the pixy face.

"Dear child, what is it?"

"Don't call me child!"

Furiously she stamped a tiny foot.

"Paali woman!"

She still clung to him, however, and now she dug a little brown toe into the leaf mold and was twisting it about as she tearfully went on.

"Please love Paali! Paali almost white; want white man. Can't talk with savages. Black man no think. Just look at Paali with—nasty grin."

"But, chi—Paali—"

"Please! Paali good girl. Love white man."

Weeping, she strained to him again.

"Please love poor little brown girl!"

Both arms tight about the warm, supple form, Krieg kissed the trembling lips now, and was not ashamed. After all, who was he to say it was wrong to take a gift so purely offered? He meant her no harm; he would revere her, because at last he knew why this girl had meant so much to him. He loved her.

He told her so now, as they sat blissfully happy together. A long hour they spent, laughing and chattering as children of any age will do who have found an all-encompassing common joy.

When at last she bounded up with a little exclamation, "Papa wake", they kissed again quite unaffectedly. A lilting "tomorrow", and she was gone.

IN THE next week they contrived to see each other often. The man in his new-found youth and the girl in her new-found maturity whiled hours of heavenly bliss. Now they wandered hand in hand through fields of riotous tropic blooms, or paddled softly in commandeered canoes up moonlit streams. But more often they sat sequestered in leafy coverts where they talked and laughed for the joy of it.

Such perfection never lasts. For Krieg and Paali life's cup of happiness seemed sure to brim; and yet the blow was close at hand that struck it from their lips.

One soughing, storm-swept night the blow came.

Paali and Krieg stood on the beach side by side, eager faces thrust seaward to meet the cooling, wild gusts of rain. Suddenly there was a rush from behind, a confusion of guttural cries, and the couple were borne from their feet. Krieg had just time thankfully to note that the black men were not harming the girl, before a rough hand clapped over his eyes and shut the dim scene out completely. The struggling white man uttered one wind-scattered yell and was felled to the wet beach unconscious.

First aid was applied—in Chicago.

Krieg came to his senses to find himself stretched flat on the sand, his limbs tightly lashed and immovable. Although he was still being soaked in the torrent, his sluggishly opened eyes could discern through the ruck a smoky half of the moon. The faint light disclosed an excited group a little way along the beach, and the wind brought fragments of high pitched jabbering. Occasionally came the word Blwoma.

Paali, held by two stalwart savages, was the center of the crowd, and she seemed to be haranguing them, a tremulous note of pleading in her voice. As the man looked, the girl suddenly wrenched her arms free, and in the flash before they were again pinioned, raised both hands to her face. Talking rapidly now, she held them there for a second in an attitude that seemed to have a decided effect upon the blacks. Rolling on to his side by a mighty effort and straining his eyes, Krieg recognized the gesture for what it was.

Paali had formed a circle of thumb and forefinger of each slender hand and, placing one to each eye, stood looking through them. The girl was exciting the savages' superstitious fear by reference to his odd-shaped goggles. Would she succeed in saving him?

At length Blwoma's men seemed to have arrived at some decision, for Krieg saw a detachment advancing toward him. He closed his aching eyes and pretended unconsciousness.

It was soon evident that Paali's exhortation had had a powerful effect.

Carefully avoiding the slightest disarrangement of Krieg's goggles, the now silent men picked up the soggy form and started along the beach. From a cautiously opened eye Krieg saw they were making around a little point. In the distance was what

looked in the dimness like some Gargantuan insect poised on the water's edge.

As the group drew nearer, the brightening moonlight showed the thing to be one of the large, out-riggered war canoes of the natives.

Arrived at the boat, the men dumped their burden in on his back. One of them, after shoving well off, vaulted into the stern with him, and with a few deft paddle thrusts drove the great dugout through the rollers.

From the dark shore came a long drawn out, despairing wail. The fellow paddled on.

Finally, when the island had dwindled to a heavy black line on a dark blue horizon, the black man stood up. With an evil grin he tossed a knife into the bow far out of Krieg's reach and pointed to a lumpy, matting-covered cargo amidships. Now he sprang overboard and swam with slow, powerful strokes shoreward. To Krieg's horror the man had taken the paddle with him. A swift current was bearing the canoe off into the cold, empty moonlight.

Paali's plea for his life had been granted.

3

THE *Laundry Ticket* picked him up.

The little ship had looked so good to Krieg that he had, for the space that elapsed between his sighting of her name and the rescue, felt really facetious. And what else but a laundry ticket could you call the name on a Chinese junk?

In addition she was, and still is, perhaps, a pirate ship. Hideously pock-marked, pig-tailed Chinese pirates trod her decks; and these same yellow gentlemen it was who fished from the drifting war canoe the little, begoggled white man. They didn't think much of the man, but they did admire his fine, large dugout. They were on the point of accepting the latter and setting the man adrift again—minus a boat—when the brainy captain had an idea.

Do you know the Mah Jongg word for "ransom"? Neither do I; but that's the word the captain used just before the rest of the crew said, "That's different." So they let the funny man ride on their boat.

Meanwhile, what did Krieg care if he was lost on a tropic ocean with a crew of yellow cut-throats? Nothing mattered now. Paali, his all, was lost to him.

He knew that, could he have gone back to Savu the very day after that heartbreaking night, the girl would still have been lost. Blwoma's men, he felt certain, had taken no more risks with her, but borne her off to the hills and a husband. And even had it not happened that night of the storm, the wedding must surely have taken place by now.

How Krieg cursed his folly!

Why had he dawdled away those few precious days he had had Paali? Damn the white men of the settlement! He should have taken the girl to the consulate in spite of their contempt, married her there and flown with her. But it was too late now; he could only curse.

Those bitter, endless days in the dugout!

The tribesmen's plans had worked out to a fiendish perfection. As well they had reckoned, it had taken him until morning just to get clear of his bonds. Hours had dragged by as Krieg had inched his stiffly trussed body forward to where the knife lay. Another hour had been lost in worming the nearly useless wrists back and forth along the blade until the tough fibers had frayed apart. And when the blood did begin to ache its way into empty veins, Krieg had sunk into a black stupor.

The sun had climbed to a point straight overhead before the half

crazed man, impelled by a raging thirst, had begun to stir about. Joy of joys, he had found the pile amidships to be made up of provisions, and among these was fresh water. In the sweet pleasure of wetting his cracking throat, Krieg had almost forgotten the plight he was in.

But in the weary days that followed, Krieg had had time to consider well his situation. From dawn until dark the castaway had searched the seas, and not a smudge nor shred of smoke or sail had ever shown itself. Sense of direction he had none, and all Krieg had known of his position was that he was far out of any traveled lanes. He had long since begun to ration himself carefully.

When his present freebooting friends had stumbled upon him, Krieg's provisions had been on the very point of exhaustion.

I

PIRATES in the China Sea. Monks in Alpine passes. These Krieg knew, and was unsatisfied.

Desperate forgetfulness in dives of Argentine. Softly reminiscing strolls on Scottish moors. Still the feverish urge to move on persisted, and Krieg covered all the globe.

But stay!

Was Thaddeus Krieg, the little old invalid harmlessly demented over the half of a diver's helmet, a world traveler? A score of witnesses—servants, nurses, doctors—can testify he was not. They will tell you the frail figure had never once left the bed to which the man had been confined since his youth. These would not stoop even to scoff at such a silly idea. Reliable witnesses they, because—they lack imagination.

But what shall we say, who know? To be sure, the man's body had lain there all these years; but when we say Thaddeus Krieg, do we mean that shell? What is a person? Is it so much meat; or is it a sentience?

Years of utter concentration in the life of the helmet had taken from the man all consciousness of the bed-bound, immobile flesh. To him Krieg of Chicago was dead. Only Krieg of the world existed.

Imagine a resurrection! Two took place.

The first had occurred in Hong-Kong, where Krieg, after having slipped over the *Laundry Ticket's* filthy side one night, had found himself stranded. Funds he must have, but how to get them? The proxy Krieg had hesitated, resolved to make the thing as shortly painless as possible, and spoken:

"Thaddeus Krieg, send money."

The bewilderment! Whose voice was that? His own? Of course, but—or now, was it? What did it mean, anyway? How—? And then, like a staggering blow, had come the restoration of a forgotten self. The jangling shock—the pain!

The other resurrection came about years later, while the wanderer was lingering in Mombasa.

Krieg had come here, as he had visited all those other units of his world neighborhood, at the goading of a demon ever pointing onward. His appetite for far-spaced sips of life had long since been sated. Now he traveled only in search of peace—of some waxing flame of interest to cauterize the sore at his heart.

Sometimes when a vista of coral key or crag-bordered fiord would awaken a response in the cold breast, he had imagined the past was dead. Other times, and glint of sun on rippling black hair or cadence of tropic-softened voice had told him the wound was still there. Those times the man had plunged himself to the depths in whatever forgetfulness was at hand.

Sunk thus we find him at the time of the second restoration. The phenomenon this time is not so easily

accounted for as before. In Hong-Kong it was physical—the action of voice upon ear. Now it could be nothing save an affair of the spirit, a calling of utter anguish to a receptive heart.

From Chicago came a cable:

"Savu. Kismet!"

5

AFTER five long years, again in Savu. But now it held no charms.

Wasting no time on moonlit palms, Krieg had at once joined the trading Johns on a trip into the bush. On the way in, Johns, who said he had never seen or heard of Paali since her honeymoon departure for the hills, had tried his best to persuade the little man to turn back. Krieg had pressed on, scarcely hearing the trader's croakings, until the company had penetrated to within a few miles of Blwoma's village. Here Johns, with many headshakes and vain exhortations, had hastily followed on after his frightened bearers, and Krieg was alone.

How next to proceed?

Krieg knew it would be suicide to forge straight ahead into the settlement. Yet this enervating suspense would not do, either. The man was almost nauseated by the strain, the waiting for—what?

The lure of Savu!

Krieg felt somehow that the veil was parting; that a complete revelation of the destiny which had been reaching out from this tiny South Seas spot was at hand. It was a premonition.

Krieg was not afraid. As for his problem of the moment, he was now but a pawn in fate's game; let fate make the move.

Fate advanced Paali!

But was this indeed his love, his sloe-eyed, slender Paali? This ugly, gross woman who smoked a cigar? There was the same copper skin; embalmed in the fat were the regular lines of the old Paali's features. Krieg's stirring heart stilled. It was she!

On her face was no light of recognition. As she waddled toward the white man she expressed only a grinning curiosity that showed blackened, pointed teeth.

Paali's childish delight was not, however, shared by the lithe-limbed black man at her heels. The newcomer walked up to Krieg, gave him a searching, contemptuous glance and spat on the goggles. With the flat of his hand he knocked the old man to the ground.

Without a look at the fallen man, the fellow turned and gave a peculiar, piercing whistle, followed by a series of hoarse, guttural shouts. From the path the couple had used came running a horde of hideously painted blacks. They fell upon the dazed white man and snatched him to his feet. With many spear prods accompanied by gleeful guffaws they marched him along the jungle trail.

Blwoma and his men!

Krieg was mildly surprized that his indifference as to his fate still held. He found himself speculating on the situation almost like a detached observer. He shrugged as his mind returned to the woman, whom he could see romping on ahead. She had lost her mind, he decided. Yes, that would be it; association for five years with none but detested savages had caused a progressive degeneration of the once fine mental fiber—had reverted her to a native—uncivilized her, as it were. That and the anguish she must have gone through at first had even taken her reason. He felt vastly sorry for her.

Blwoma must have known who he was at once—recognized him from his henchmen's description. Judging by the way he had treated the goggles, he was not so superstitious as his men.

Krieg caught himself smiling grimly as he thought of the dressing down the savages must have got those years before when they had let the white man go. Paali must have suffered, too, for her part in the affair.

By present appearance, the black chieftain did not intend to let the captive escape another time. The party had arrived at the village. Amid the wildest confusion of shrill, naked children and yappy mongrels, they were heading straight for a large post driven into the ground.

Now everything moved with businesslike dispatch. While men busied themselves with tying their prisoner firmly to the stake, women and children vied with one another in collecting brush and fagots to pile around the man.

When all was in readiness, Blwoma approached from a detached, folded-arm dignity and breasted insolently up to the captive. He made as if to sweep the hated goggles from the man's brow; then, apparently disdaining to touch the things, once more he spat upon them. Turning, he snatched from a lieutenant a blazing brand and cast it at Krieg's feet.

This, then, was the end!

But why was he so calm? This was death—slow, horrible! But was he not ready for death? His desires of years had been satisfied; he had at last known the life he had wanted. What more could he ask than so fitting a death?

The man who was two could die happy!

HAVING finished the demolition of the "devil's contrivance", Dr. Gray turned to cover the dead man's face, and stopped transfixed.

Over the face so lately distorted in pain had stolen an ineffable, tired happiness, like a child gone to sleep with his toys.

The

DEATH BOTTLE

By VOLNEY G. MATHISON

A Tale of Crime, and the Sea, and the fate of Black Sigurd

In WEIRD TALES
Next Month

On Sale At All News Stands February First

THE real estate agent was voluble in the extreme. He was a plump, dapper, self-important little man, not unmindful of the honor that had fallen upon him in the handling of so important a piece of property as that now under discussion. His volubility did not always bear directly upon the subject in hand, but that did not greatly matter, since the price had been named and in three minutes they would be on their way for a careful inspection of the fine old Tudor house and parklike grounds.

Stannard was doing his best not to look pleased; he meant to be diplomatic in the matter and betray no surprize at what he considered the extreme reasonableness of the price. He did not wish to appear too obviously satisfied, but his elation over the prospective purchase betrayed itself in spite of himself.

Fenton, who had accompanied Stannard as interested friend and adviser, was leaning forward in an attitude of absorbed and flattering attention while the real estate agent talked. Fenton had a round, childlike countenance expressing such extreme good humor that it was inevitably expected of him that he should remain polite and attentive when others' patience had worn a bit thin. Accordingly Fenton listened and Stannard reflected, and as he reflected, the expression of surprize and pleasure he had made so futile an effort to conceal, gradually diminished of its own accord. Presently he interrupted, sharply and without apology.

"The fact is," he asserted, "it is the very reasonableness of the price asked that makes me hesitate. It would almost suggest that there might be something undesirable about the place."

The real estate agent stooped to remove a thread from his boot laces and examined it long and critically before he saw fit to respond almost reproachfully, "As we are about to make an exhaustive inspection of the place this very morning, you will have ample opportunity to decide that for yourself. Personally, I may say that it is in my estimation the most absolutely desirable property in the state, and did it fall to me to decide whether or no it should be my purchase, the decision would take but a short time, sir."

"True," returned Stannard dryly. "But there are occasionally matters which do not appear on a casual inspection."

"Ghosts?" suggested Fenton facetiously, and his untimely jest was received with a frown of impatience from Stannard.

"No," he returned, "I do not mean ghosts. I mean drains, defective plumbing, dampness, anything tending to insanitary condition. How long, may I ask, did the present owners occupy the house?"

A slight flush of embarrassment crossed the face of the agent. "As a matter of fact, sir, only two months. They appear to be a somewhat erratic family and decided quite suddenly to leave for Europe for a prolonged stay. They sail, I believe, in a few days."

"And the owner before that?"

"Lived to an advanced age upon his estate and died in a state of perfect health."

"Died in a state of perfect health!" echoed Fenton. "That is a bit unusual, is it not?"

"Fortunately, yes. The unhappy man committed suicide."

Stannard glanced up quickly, quite evidently displeased.

"Naturally," he commented, "there is always a certain prejudice against the scenes of such tragedies. The fact is, I am to be married next autumn and my fiancée, at present abroad, is of a peculiarly sensitive—"

The agent interrupted with a return of his sprightly self-confidence.

"The tragedy, my dear sir, did not take place on or near the estate of which we are speaking. It was a sad case, a very sad case; the old gentleman had an only son, and when news was brought to him of the boy's sudden and violent death under most disgraceful circumstances, it was too much for the father and he—"

"Yes?" questioned Stannard impatiently.

"Hanged himself."

Stannard considered.

"I am sorry," he said at last, "to have any association of tragedy connected with my home, yet, if as you say, the unfortunate man was away at the time, the association is not really very marked."

He glanced at Fenton, who nodded encouragement.

"Can't see that it need influence you in the least," Fenton asserted.

The real estate agent rose with cheerful alacrity.

"My car is at the door and I am completely at your service," said he.

IT REALLY was a wonderful old house! As the three men passed from room to room Stannard's satisfaction with his good fortune in procuring it became too intense for dissimulation. Fine old woodwork, spacious fireplaces, finely proportioned rooms and windows were everywhere in evidence. The paneling of the main hall and the sweep of the stairs was magnificent.

On the second floor the agent paused before a door, felt in his pocket for a key and presently disclosed a great room half filled with large, handsome pieces of old mahogany.

"The only articles of furniture which do not go with the house," he exclaimed. "Heirlooms, you know, and as their destination is a little uncertain, permission was given to allow them to remain here for the present. Of course, sir, if you have the slightest objection—"

Stannard had no objection. He was himself something of a collector and he regarded the pieces with an appreciative eye before he reluctantly followed the agent out and watched him lock the door.

When the inspection had been completed there remained only the question of setting the time at which the transaction should formally take place. The owner, it appeared, was somewhat in haste to have the matter concluded, and Stannard was as eager to come into possession of his property. And having nothing better to

do it was decided that Stannard and Fenton should remain a while longer on the grounds while the agent proceeded to arrange for a speedy settling of the business. It was well past lunch hour when the two men finally emerged through the fine iron gates that formed the main entrance.

Near the gate a man lounged idly against the wall and regarded them with apparent interest.

"Thinking of buying?" he inquired as they approached him.

"I certainly am," responded Stannard.

The man smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

Stannard was in that especial state of good humor which expresses itself in extreme sociability.

"Why?" he asked. "Were you thinking of buying it yourself?"

"No, I was *not*."

There was an emphasis in the denial so singular that it attracted attention.

"Why not?" asked Stannard sharply.

Again the man gave that peculiarly exasperating shrug.

"It's not for me to carry rumors about what is none of my business, but—"

"But what?"

"You'll have a hard time keeping servants in that house."

"Every one has a hard time keeping servants in any house. Is that all?"

"I guess that is about all."

The admission was made with an ironical smile and the man, turning, was about to walk away, but after a few steps he looked back and spoke.

"Like cats?" he asked quizzically.

"*Cats!*" repeated Stannard. "Why, yes, I like 'em fairly well."

"Then maybe you'll like this one," responded the stranger, and, quickening his pace, he was soon out of sight.

The two men regarded each other for a minute, then both of them laughed aloud.

"Cats!" exclaimed Stannard. "What have they to do with the price of real estate?"

TOGETHER they returned to the city, and it was well on in the afternoon before they again referred to their singular encounter with the stranger at the gate.

"Look here," said Stannard abruptly, "I am going to see the owner of that property before things go any farther. He's probably still at his office, and it isn't far from here. I am going to ask him—"

"If he likes cats?" queried Fenton discreetly.

"No. I am going to find out why they left that house."

Fenton reached for his hat. The question had been troubling his mind also during the afternoon.

They found the man they were looking for, Mr. Austin, a fair, placid-looking gentleman with a friendly, benevolent smile. Much of the friendliness faded away, however, when their visit was accounted for.

"I think that my agent can give you any information which you could wish regarding the house," he stated a bit stiffly. "I myself am exceedingly busy as—"

"Your agent has never lived in the house," interrupted Stannard with decision. "If you will excuse me, I should like to know just what your reasons were for leaving it."

"Since you flatter me with so keen an interest in my personal affairs," returned Mr. Austin, "I am leaving because of a sudden decision to go to Europe for a prolonged stay."

Stannard shook his head.

"I have heard something in the village," he protested. "It sounds rather like nonsense, but still I wish to have it cleared up—something about a cat."

Mr. Austin smiled blandly, but a slight flush of annoyance spread over his pleasant features.

"True," said he, "there certainly was 'something about a cat.' It was an ordinary, scrawny black cat which the servants used to meet scurrying through the dark passages of the upper floors. The disturbing thing about it was that the poor creature had about its neck a bit of frayed cord, and (you know the credulity of servants) it reminded them unpleasantly of the fate of the unhappy former owner of the place."

"I know that there are persons who have a peculiar horror of cats," suggested Stannard.

"A good many persons had a horror of this particular cat," conceded Austin dryly.

"Well," persisted Stannard, "couldn't you keep the creature out?"

"That, it appeared, could not be done."

"How did it get in?"

"Nobody was able to discover. In fact there wasn't any way for it to get in."

"Did you look yourself for its place of entrance?"

"I did."

Stannard smiled his incredulity.

"I think under the circumstances," he suggested suavely, "I should have shot the cat."

Mr. Austin hesitated. Then, "The fact is, sir, we did shoot the cat. The butler followed it out one night and shot it. He left it lying dead beside the rear entrance and in the morning it had disappeared; that evening one of the servants met it scurrying through an upper corridor, with a bit of frayed cord dangling about its neck."

Stannard rose, smiling.

"Your butler was not a very good shot," he commented. "And you mean to tell me that you have actually left that remarkable place because of this trivial annoyance?"

Mr. Austin regarded him coldly.

"I believe I have already stated, sir, we left the house because of a sudden decision to go to Europe for an indefinite stay."

"Ah," returned Stannard, "and I reap the benefit of your decision."

ON THE way home Stannard was in high spirits.

"Well, well, so that is the nigger in the woodpile!" he laughed. "It doesn't take much to throw a hysterical family into a panic once some suggestion of the supernatural has been raised."

Stannard wished to lose no time in establishing himself on his new domain. With two or three rooms made habitable he could be on hand to direct a certain amount of redecorating that was to be done, and also he was impatient of any delay in actually taking possession. Fenton was to be his guest.

"You wouldn't leave me alone in that house, with the possibility of coming face to face with a cat at any moment!" he protested jokingly.

Fenton answered, "I am not going to leave you alone to shoot nine lives out of the same cat; I'd rather make sure by taking a few shots myself."

The two men spent the first evening together in the great living room, to which they had succeeded in imparting an air of agreeable domesticity.

Fenton alternately read and listened to the beat of the rain; he had no wedding in the autumn to look forward to and consequently considerably less to occupy his mind.

Suddenly Stannard roused himself and sat upright.

"Fenton," he said, "someone looked in at that window just now."

Fenton appeared a bit doubtful. It was not a night on which anyone would choose to go traveling about a house in the country to which no conceivable business could call him at that hour of the night. For a

while both men sat alert, waiting to hear the ring of the front door bell.

But there was no summons from any belated visitor and Fenton returned to his book, leaving Stannard once more to his revery. It was late when they went upstairs to the room which they were to occupy together. They slept well, that is, except for one incident in the night, which after all was not very disconcerting, though it was singular—they both admitted that it was really quite singular.

Stannard had been awakened to find Fenton sitting upright in bed.

"What on earth is that?" said Fenton.

Stannard looked and presently became aware of a soft, glowing light, somewhat nebulous in appearance, moving leisurely across the end of the room beyond the foot of the bed. Slowly it passed before them, turning after a while till it seemed to be standing by the side of the bed.

"Why, it's—it's *looking* at us," laughed Fenton. To Stannard it seemed that the laugh was rather nervous.

After a moment's pause this singular appearance returned slowly by the way it had come, and disappeared. Fenton rose somewhat sheepishly and closed the door.

"What was it?" he asked.

"That," answered Stannard briskly, "was the reflection from the lamps of a passing automobile."

Fenton considered. It was perfectly evident that no automobile could by any possibility throw a light into that particular room even if it were likely that one were passing on Stannard's private driveway at that late hour of the night. But there was little use in arguing the question and presently they were both sleeping soundly and well.

The morning was almost passed before either of them alluded to the night before, then Stannard said thoughtfully, "I wish we knew what causes that effect of light. Of course I don't mind it, but if Evelyn should see it she might get curious about it and in mentioning it outside bring forth in reply some of those idiotic cat stories."

"We'll investigate," said Fenton, and Stannard agreed with him, though just what form the investigation should take was a bit hazy in both their minds.

That evening they talked for a while over their cigars, discussing various practical questions with regard to the arrangement of the house, and then Stannard announced his intention of finishing the reading of a book he had begun some time before. He turned toward the big library table and after a fruitless search remembered having left it on the dressing table of the room in which they had slept.

FENTON heard him whistling gaily as he mounted the stairs to the room above. The electricians had been busy with the lights, and these were not yet in order on the upper floors, but a bright moonlight flooded in through the broad windows, making a light unnecessary. Stannard advanced, still whistling, and picked up the book. He was about to withdraw when some instinct caused him to glance toward the bed, and at that instant he started so violently that the book fell with a crash to the floor.

Something lay on the bed, something long and still, covered with a carefully arranged sheet. It looked like the body of a man. For a moment Stannard stood hesitating, then he deliberately crossed the room to the side of the bed and placed his hand upon what appeared to be the head of the thing. There was no mistaking the contour of the nose and chin beneath the sheet.

Stannard sprang through the door and made his way downstairs. But

as he neared the door of the room where Fenton sat, he slackened his speed; he did not wish to display any emotion either in his voice or face.

"Fenton," he said at last, and his voice was creditably steady, "will you come upstairs with me? I want you to see something."

A minute later both men entered the bedroom door and stood facing the bed. Certainly there was nothing there. There was no trace on the smooth surface of the counterpane that anything had at any time rested there. Stannard bent forward and passed his hands over the place where the thing had lain.

"A minute ago," he said in bewilderment, "the dead body of a man, covered with a sheet, lay on the bed."

"That," said Fenton, "is obviously impossible."

"I saw it distinctly," persisted Stannard; "furthermore, I *felt* it."

"That is impossible," repeated Fenton. "Even if the house were infested with ghosts or spooks or whatever you choose to name them, you couldn't *feel* them. Furthermore, if anything so heavy as the body of a dead man had been placed upon the bed, the imprint would still be there."

Stannard passed his hand across his forehead.

"For heaven's sake, have patience with me," he pleaded. "It was a dreadful experience!"

Later that night Stannard paused at the bedroom door.

"You mean to say you expect me to sleep where that thing has lain?" he asked miserably.

"Nothing was there, old fellow. Think for yourself how impossible it is."

"Then," said Stannard unhappily, "I am a very sick man."

Fenton looked at him thoughtfully.

"We might manage to rig up another place to sleep," he suggested, but Stannard seemed to rouse himself from the mood into which he had fallen. "Nonsense," he said, "I am all right. I suppose the moonlight made it look—but Fenton, I *felt* of the thing, that's what beats me, I *felt* of the thing and it was a human body."

They slept, nevertheless, in that same room, and the odd part of it was, they slept none the less well for that affair of the evening. In the light of the morning Stannard seemed less sure that he had really put his hand on that figure under the sheet. He thought that perhaps the shock of what he saw, or supposed that he saw, had unsettled him for the time.

Both men decided upon a holiday and went off for a long tramp through the country. This took up most of the day. They sat long over dinner, which they had at the little inn in the village, and entered the house that evening in high spirits. The electricians had completed their work and Fenton had quietly turned on every one of the numerous lights. The full illumination was in fact somewhat trying, but it had its effect. It would be difficult indeed to consider anything of a supernatural order subjecting itself to that intense and penetrating glare.

Fenton talked glibly of all the agreeable things he could think of. They spoke of Evelyn's return, of some lucrative business which had come into their hands, of the athletic news, and finally of the latest political scandal. And presently, perhaps because of the intense light and the long walk they had taken that day, Fenton found himself being gradually overcome by a persistent drowziness. Several times he had roused himself, when he suddenly started up from a pleasant sleep, at the sound of a cry of horror from his companion.

Stannard was standing in the center of the room, his arms stretched forward as if to ward off something

which he saw approaching, and a look of unspeakable terror was upon his face.

As Fenton started toward him, Stannard fell forward his full length upon the hearth rug. When he had regained consciousness he grasped his friend convulsively by the wrist.

"He was there, by that window, looking in," he whispered with white lips. "He was looking in, watching us."

"Who was?"

"*He* was; the man that once lived here—the man that hanged himself! He was there at that window, I tell you! I saw him plainly."

Fenton looked toward the window to which Stannard had pointed.

"I see a bush that sways slightly in the breeze," he suggested. "Do you still think you see him?"

"No," said Stannard, "he has gone. But oh, his face was horrible, horrible! Fenton, we must leave this house."

Fenton agreed. Certainly it was best to leave the house as quickly as possible, but Stannard divined that his companion's concern was for his, Stannard's, mental condition and that Fenton remained unconvinced as to what had been seen. Abruptly he assumed a new attitude of mind.

"Fenton," he said, "if there is really something strange about this house, you ought to see it as well as I, and I propose to stay here until you do. If I keep on seeing things and you don't, I'll know my mind is going, and I had better know it for sure before—before Evelyn comes back."

"Very well," conceded Fenton, "we'll go over to the inn for a good night's rest and we'll come back tomorrow and see what's up."

"No," said Stannard, "we'll stay right here, tonight."

It was some time before Fenton was willing to agree, but the futility of further argument was all too apparent.

THE two men settled themselves in comfortable chairs facing the window. The thought of sleep was out of the question, yet the glare of the light made the matter of remaining awake a difficult one. They spoke little and they listened intently. Presently Stannard rose abruptly.

"I've got to shut that door back of us," he exclaimed. "I feel that he might be there instead of at the window."

Fenton's eyes anxiously followed him and so it happened that they both turned at the same time to look again at the window. Stannard caught Fenton's arm with a grip of desperation.

"Do you see him?" he cried. "Do you see what I see?"

"Yes," answered Fenton through dry lips, "I do."

"You are not humoring me, Fenton? You see—tell me what you see!"

"I see an old man, in evening clothes, looking at us through the window. His face is horribly discolored and distorted, and one sleeve is badly torn. Around his throat is a frayed bit of rope. He—he looks like one who has been dead for some time."

Stannard gave a sudden sob of relief. Horrible as it was, it was better than the madness which he had feared had come upon him.

"Now," he said, "we will go; the sooner the better."

As the two men stepped hurriedly out into the night, something came rushing past them in the darkness, something which sprang with the agility of a great cat into a tree growing close beside the house.

Fenton caught his companion's arm and stood still.

"Wait," he said; "something else is coming."

And at that instant another dark figure dashed past them and made for the tree. As they strained their eyes in the darkness it seemed to them that the figure disappeared through the window into the house.

"That last one was a man," said Fenton with decision, "a live man! He must be stark mad to be pursuing such a thing as we saw, but, Stannard, I am going to help him; I am going back into the house."

Without another word they turned back and threw open the door. It was no longer the quiet, deserted house they had just left; from above stairs came the sound of crashing furniture, the fall of heavy bodies, of scuffling feet and of breaking glass.

Stannard ran forward toward the stairs, but at that instant there appeared before them the creature from whom they had fled, now doubly hideous in his evident fright and desperation. His red-rimmed, horrible eyes darted this way and that in a very frenzy of terror; the blue, emaciated lips curved back in a fearful, menacing grin; and as his head turned the bit of rope curled and twisted as if inspired with efforts of its own to make an end to its victim once and forever.

Suddenly Stannard's horror turned to a frantic, irrepressible loathing. He *must* destroy this dreadful thing which had returned so hideously from its grave. With a sense of unspeakable rage he turned and dashed after the creature as it darted past him through the hall.

Stannard was aware at times during the chase that the others had come into the room and were endeavoring to help him by throwing barricades in the thing's path and by preventing its escape through the windows and doors. But Stannard did not wish them to intercept the monster; he wished to destroy this embodiment of horror with his own hands.

And then he had the thing down with a resounding crash, Stannard himself fallen sprawling upon him. Stannard's hands grasped for the throat, found it, sank his fingers into the flesh and then suddenly let go.

For the flesh he felt beneath his finger tips was warm, live flesh, with the unmistakable texture of youth and vigor in it. The surprize of it was more terrible than if he had found what he had expected.

And a startlingly familiar voice was saying in his ear, "All right, all *right!* No rough stuff, I give up."

A voice he knew well! *Whose* voice?

Then somehow, instead of the straggling gray hair and ashen mask there was the plump ruddy face of the real estate agent before him.

A MAN who wore the badge of a detective, the man who had started in pursuit, stood smiling down at him. Stannard recoiled, shuddering, and stood up.

"What is he doing here? I almost killed him! Is it a joke? Am I mad? For God's sake, somebody tell me!"

The detective answered with a brisk assurance.

"I guess it is about this way: our friend here got into debt pretty bad, and there wasn't much prospect of getting out again, until this property came into his hands and he got his first big commission. That cleared him—almost, not quite. He needed another and he got it; black cats are plentiful enough around here. And not being satisfied with clearing his debts, I suppose he wanted a little extra pocket money. Looks like he tried to shift owners once too often."

The real estate agent sat up and resentfully rubbed the back of his head as he addressed Stannard, "Well, it's thanks to me you got this estate; *you* ought not to complain."

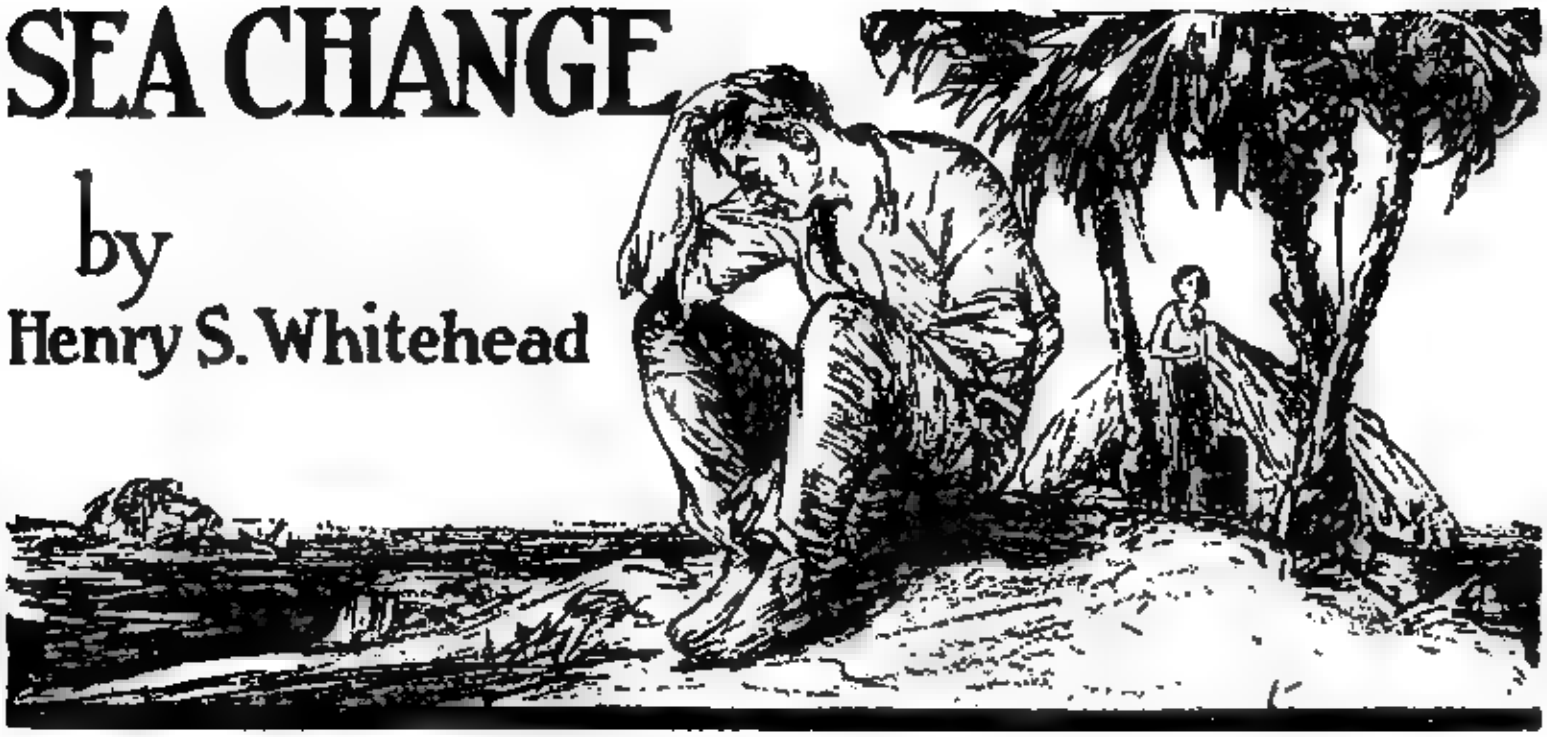
"I don't," said Stannard, "but how about Austin?"

The real estate agent looked up at him with reproachful eyes.

"Didn't Austin tell you himself that they left because of a sudden decision to go to Europe?"

SEA CHANGE

by Henry S. Whitehead



Author of "Tea Leaves," "The Fireplace," etc.

THERE were few secrets aboard the *Kestrel*, and her passenger Edward Renwick knew about the imminent typhoon almost as soon as the members of the crew. He had seen a kind of halo about the sun, which became more apparent as the day wore on. That was the first indication, and Captain Hansen had made no secret of its probable meaning. Hansen's noon observations confirmed his own suspicions on the day the halo first appeared, when they were some two hundred miles north of the Paumotus Group. The barometer was falling steadily, and light squalls had come spanking down during the night. Today the sea was smooth and marked with delicate ripples like a marshy millpond. When the swell began late in the afternoon, all precautions had been taken.

Hansen explained the course of a typhoon to Renwick in snatches. He spoke of cross-currents, atmospheric pressure, and various other indications. Renwick gathered that it was the accompanying "revolving air-currents" which wrought the greatest damage to ships caught in these seasonal hurricanes of the South Seas.

Marian, his young wife, appeared unimpressed. She leaned over the rail to windward, her brown hair blowing in the freshening breeze, and Renwick retailed to her what he had gathered from Hansen's bits of nautical science. The sky had taken on a coppery glint which, despite its menace, allured them by its utter strangeness. Beneath, the sea seemed changed. One could no longer look down into its almost fathomless depths. It seemed deadened, obscure.

Everything had been made fast. Hatches were screwed down, lashings were renovated, and the davits examined. It was the provisioning of the three boats which first caused a catch at the girl's heart. Renwick reassured her. This was routine. It was only to save time. It would be an easy matter to reship the stores when the blow was over.

It was nearly nightfall when a heavy cloud-bank appeared out of the northwest, ominous and dreadful, soaring up out of the nothingness on the other side of the horizon like a huge, elongated funnel. It was very clearly marked even in the failing light which soon obscured it. They gazed at it, fascinated; but when they turned away from the rail they turned back to a changed ship. A foreboding of disaster had laid hold

upon the crew. They went about their duties white-faced, subdued, as though profoundly disturbed by a sense of something imminent that could not be stayed or avoided. . .

The last thing they saw before they went below was two men removing the stores from the smallest of the three boats. On their way to their cabins below decks Captain Hansen gloomily admitted to Marian Renwick's question that this boat was unseaworthy. But there was ample room in the other boats, he assured her, if it should come to that!

They decided to remain awake and dressed during the night. They dined hastily on sandwiches and tea, and sat in their stuffy little cabin waiting for the typhoon to break.

THE *Kestrel's* sudden, wild swoop under its first impact came as a relief. The period of anxious waiting was over now. They were in for it.

The *Kestrel* wallowed, and the plunge seemed to the Renwicks more like the plunge of a frightened animal than anything a ship might do. Then, under careful guidance, she settled into a steady drive into the wind, her auxiliary engines doing their utmost.

It was Hansen's announced purpose to wear through until he could bear to the southward and "get behind" the cyclone, and this policy he did his best to carry out. The stanch windjammer stood up bravely, and might indeed have weathered through had not the engines given out. The engines stopped. Her headway abruptly ceasing, the *Kestrel* was seized by the typhoon as though in monstrous and malignant arms and hurled and spun about in a chaos of mountainous waves.

In their cabin the two passengers were hurled together into a corner. They managed to seize and hold on to the edge of their lower bunk. They had been slung partly under it. Renwick braced his feet against the wall at the bunk's end and by main force held himself and his wife against this firm support. Beyond a few bruises neither had been hurt. Lurch and twist now as the *Kestrel* might, they, fastened like limpets, spun with her. They were dizzy and sick when the *Kestrel* by an almost impish streak of luck righted herself and began to spin along with her keel down and her bow leading her. She had, after an incredible knocking about, in the course of the upheaval, gone completely about. She righted herself slowly and heavily and then scudded away before the mounting gale, naked to her sticks.

Some time after this comparative steadiness of motion had replaced the maddening upheavals, Renwick and his wife relaxed their grip on the bunkside and reassured themselves that they were able to stand upright. Marian was very giddy, and Renwick, after helping her into the lower bunk and wedging her in with bedding, staggered to the deck in search of information.

Hansen reassured him. How the *Kestrel* had lived he was unable to understand, still less to explain, but now they had more than a fair chance, he thought, to ride it out; as good a chance as any windjammer unequipped with auxiliary power. If only he had not trusted to the engines! No one would ever know what had happened. Both the engineer and his assistant were dead. They had been remorselessly jammed and crushed by the terrible tossing, there in their tiny engineroom. The engineer was unrecognizable. Five of the crew, too, were gone, washed away by the mountains of water that had been flung athwart the exposed decks.

There was comparatively little danger now. There were no leaks, though the house, all railings, and everything above decks was gone, that is, all save the masts, and, almost a miracle, the

boats. All three boats were safe, and, as hasty examination showed, intact, including the small boat that had been relieved of its provisions because of its unseaworthiness.

The *Kestrel* drove on through the night, under the slowly declining force of the typhoon, now blowing itself out. Food and coffee were served but no one thought of turning in.

The moon rose a little after four bells, flooding the pursuing waters and the deck of the *Kestrel*. It was full, and the light was clear and brilliant. Renwick and his young wife, on deck again, carefully worked their way to the small boat, where they clung to the rigging of the davits and looked outboard and aft where the long waves pursued relentlessly, like angry mountains.

"What's the matter with the boat?" asked Marian.

"I suppose it's been allowed to dry out too much. It seems sound enough to me, but naturally Hansen wouldn't have said it was no good unless he knew what he was talking about."

They watched it swing. The davit rigging had been considerably loosened.

"Let's get into it!" suggested Marian, suddenly.

Renwick investigated. The canvas boat cover had not been replaced. There was no chock. He climbed gingerly into the boat, and with his help Marian managed it also. Then Renwick again descended to the deck and loosened the pulley ropes and stays so that, with the swing of the level binnacle-lamp in his mind, the small boat might have a wider arc in which to swing and so keep them comparatively free from the pitching and tossing of the *Kestrel*.

It was a landsman's notion, a mere whimsy. A seaman would have scoffed at it, but, queerly enough, it seemed to work. He climbed back into the swinging boat and settled down in its bottom beside Marian.

The boat was, of course, swung inboard, and being small compared to the larger boats, both of which were chocked firmly, it swung free. Renwick felt that since the boat had been condemned they might make free with it, and he pulled some old cork life-preservers out from under the thwarts and arranged them under Marian's head and his own. It was a weird sensation, lying there side by side looking up into the clear, moonlight sky, relatively motionless as the swinging boat accommodated itself to the rolling and pitching of the *Kestrel*.

They lay there and listened to the roar of the wind and sea. Both were dozing, fitfully, when the *Kestrel* struck.

Without warning there came a fearful, grinding crash forward. The *Kestrel* shivered and then appeared to crumple, her deck tilting to an abrupt angle. In the boat the impact was greatly modified, yet it would have been enough without that shattering crash ahead to have awakened people much more soundly asleep than Renwick and his wife. The masts snapped like pipestems.

The deck stayed on its perilous slant as the vessel hung on the teeth of the barrier reef on which she had struck bow on, while the great following waves roared over her in cascades. They lifted the small boat and tore it loose from its frayed tackle and carried it far forward, as with a tremendous and irresistible heave a huge following wave, overtopping its fellows, lifted the *Kestrel's* hull and heaved her forward for more than her own length and crushed her down upon the rocks. She parted like rotten cloth as she turned turtle and was engulfed in a mighty whirlpool of maddened water.

The small boat with two helpless wisps of humanity lying side by side upon her bottom, riding free, was

borne forward on the resistless force of the rushing water.

2

WHEN Edward Renwick's mother died he had the satisfaction of realizing that she passed out of the world forgetful of a remembered terror that had colored her thoughts as long as he could remember. His mother, left alone early in his life, had never once relaxed her vigilance over him. Now with her death he realized rather abruptly that no one remained to share the secret of what he knew.

Renwick himself knew it only as a matter of hearsay. His own memory did not extend to what they had called The Terrible Time, because then he had been little more than an infant.

His earliest days, he had been told, were like those of any other young child. It was not until he was two years old that The Change had begun.

He had always, since birth, slept more soundly than other children. Always his mother had been obliged to awaken him from a deep sleep like the inveterate slumbers of some young, hibernating animal. His growth had been regular, but slow.

They had always spent their summers at the ranch in those days. When he was two, just after they had arrived at the ranch, The Change began.

The child first lost his power of speech. His utterance became thicker, constantly, and less intelligible. Soon there remained only a few vague mutterings. Meantime he slept more and more soundly. It became correspondingly harder and harder to awaken him. His face began to grow expressionless, then repulsive. His skin became roughened and dry, and a waxy pallor overspread it. Wrinkles appeared on his forehead. The eyelids swelled. The nostrils flattened out, the ears thickened, and the fine baby hair, which had become harsh, like rough tow, fell out, leaving little pitiful bald patches. Then the child's teeth, which were small and irregular, blackened rapidly.

Finally, before the eyes of the distracted young parents, many miles distant from any center of even crude civilization, the child seemed to be shrinking in size, and his hands and feet to be turning in.

Nothing comparable to this shattering affliction lay within the utmost bounds of their understanding or experience. For several weeks their changeling continued to deteriorate. Then, at the end of their resources, in despair, the father rode the thirty miles to the nearest telegraph office and sent an urgent message to their New York physician. The urgency of the message assured the doctor of an unusual need. He arranged his practise and journeyed to his friends.

The doctor spent several days, greatly puzzled, watching the child, now grotesquely deformed. He no longer recognized his mother. No longer had he the energy to sit upright.

Then the doctor, armed with photographs and other results of his investigations, went back to New York to consult specialists.

He did not return to the ranch, but he explained at length the findings of those whom he had consulted. The child, they said, had become a cretin. This, explained Dr. Sturgis, meant that there had occurred one of those mystifying cases of failure of a gland. It was one of the ductless glands, probably the thyroid, in the lower portion of the throat. All the ductless glands were connected in some mysterious way. They operated in a human being somewhat like an interlocking directorate in business. One was dependent upon another. When anything like this silent, internal cataclysm occurred, the nicely adjusted balance was disturbed, and the victim became a monster.

What were the chances? The doctors were of the opinion that the case was not, necessarily, hopeless. He sent a preparation of the thyroid glands of sheep with directions for their administration and for the child's care. It was, further, the opinion of the specialists that so long as the child, if he recovered this time, continued to take thyroid, so long, in all probability, would he continue to grow and be normal. But they believed (all but one) that if the supply should be cut off, then that devastating process would repeat itself; and if the medication should be stopped, then the child would degenerate again until he had become a vegetative idiot. One doctor had been skeptical, Dr. Sturgis wrote. He had approved the medication but had said that there was a possibility that the wasted gland might re-establish itself.

Confronted with the terrible alternative the doctor had described, it was no wonder that the young parents had made the daily capsule young Renwick's first duty, had impressed this upon him in season and out of season. The treatment worked. Within a few days the child's hands and feet were less cold. Other slight changes showed themselves daily. When three weeks had passed Edward was again noticing his surroundings. Gradually, through days and nights of anguished fears and a tentative, dawning hope, the young parents watched the return to normality. The child smiled, and attempted to play. He recognized his mother and father.

His growth became rapid. The remaining early teeth appeared and were firm, even, and white. A new growth of hair came in. By the end of summer the little boy was not only as well as he had ever been, but it was as though he had, in some magical fashion, been renewed. A new soul seemed to his mother to be looking out of his clear eyes.

In October, tremulous with thankfulness, they returned to their home in New York. Their friends commented freely on the child's remarkable growth.

WHEN his mother died, he was twenty-five, alone in the world; alone with his queer secret. He had health and strength, a keen mind and a vigorous body. He was indistinguishable from any normal person—from any *other* normal person, as he liked to phrase the matter to himself. He could do precisely what anyone else might do. He might even marry, provided that he never omitted his daily capsule!

There was no reason, even of ordinary convenience, why he should ever omit it. Thyroid was easily procurable in these days. One could buy it in tablet form in any good drug store.

It was less than a year after his mother's death; he was twenty-six, when he became engaged to Marian. They were married five months later.

They had been drawn together by a community of tastes and interests. They possessed that indefinable happiness of being at ease with each other.

Among their common tastes was one that amounted to a positive longing—a yearning nostalgia for the sea. They discovered this very early in their acquaintance. They found that each had for long spent many hours on the Battery, smelling the smells of shipping, watching the ships as they faded serenely into the mists of the lower bay on their way to the varied ports of the outer world.

The peculiar glamors of Joseph Conrad, and of old Samuel Baker; Kipling's eery power to evoke a longing in his readers to go and join a ship's crew—these and many other glimpses of sea-things had laid their several holds upon their imaginations. They envisaged in their day-dreams tropic moons and palm-ringed atolls. Creaming blue surf, and white beaches blaz-

ing against turquoise sea had, somehow, got into their blood.

> Palms on blue sea's edge of coral,
> Driving gust and shrieking gale;
> Scudding, spindrift, decks a-creaking,
> Simoon's breath on baking sands,
> Buccaneers, and mission-compounds,
> Wrecks, and death in distant lands.

It was little wonder that, with their imaginations so hugely intrigued by the sea's fascination and its everlasting mystery, they had for their wedding journey engaged passage on the *Kestrel*. That was why they were in the South Pacific.

They satisfied each other profoundly, in a perfection of companionship for which the stanch old windjammer had proved to be the perfect setting. It was almost as though they had been born again, once their feet knew the swing of a deck. It seemed to them, like city-bred children drinking in the first invigorating, elusive breath of the salt sea, that it would always be impossible to encompass enough of that atmosphere. And if it was true that each felt this profound yearning for the breath of the salt winds stiffly blowing, it was true also that there ran through the fine fabric of their association something like a thin thread of somberness, almost of apprehension. It seemed to them too splendid and soul-filling to be true or otherwise than the gossamer stuff of which dreams are made.

NOT even a periodic missionary ever came to the tiny atoll. Most of its forty-four Polynesian inhabitants had had a hand at one time or another on the gunwales of the skiff when it was dragged through the surf of the inner reefs.

The "unseaworthy" boat, the boat condemned as useless, had served Renwick and Marian well. Unconscious after that first mad ride away from the devils on the crest of a mountain of water, they had lain motionless, side by side in the boat's bottom, and so kept her trimmed as wave after great wave had successively carried them on and on through the torn waters of the reefs to the shallows within reach of the islanders.

Renwick's first half-conscious act when, from that fearful dream of grinding and hoarse cries of despair, and being smothered and hurled helplessly about, he awoke upon a pile of coco mats, was to reach into his pocket for the little metal box in which he carried his capsules. Then he thought of Marian, realizing dimly that he was, somehow, safe, and with a shudder, he reassured himself of her safety. She was sleeping peacefully, the sleep of utter exhaustion, on another pile of mats, near by. They were in a wattled hut. An intolerably bright sun was streaming through a low doorway and in at the lacelike interstices of the palm fronds that formed the roof.

He rose painfully to his feet, swaying with weakness, and took the little metal box out of his pocket and looked into it. There were eight of the capsules in the box.

Marian was safe. God be thanked! God was good, good, unbelievably good! Aching in every joint, Renwick stooped and passed out through the low doorway into the full, blinding glitter of the pouring sunlight.

A chirping mutter of many soft voices greeted him. The kindly islanders approached from every quarter. He saw them, bewilderedly, his hand shading his eyes from the glare.

A smiling woman placed a hat of plaited split grass upon his head. A fine, upstanding, elderly man addressed him in a strange parody of English, making him welcome. This native had been, it appeared, in the Paumotus. It was he who told what had happened: how they had come ashore; how the islanders had gone out through the surf to salvage an

empty ship's boat, driving in through the jagged reefs; how he and his *vahine* had been found in the boat's bottom, "asleep" side by side. . .

The rest of the *Kestrel's* company had found their "death in distant lands." Timber enough for several hut foundations was all that had come ashore.

Somewhere, out there beyond the distant farther reefs, lay the broken hull of the *Kestrel;* and somewhere within her submerged, inaccessible cabins, were the capsules that meant life. . .

He had eight. For one week and one day, then, he was safe. After that . . . A cold horror closed down upon him. He suddenly felt faint. Groping, overwhelmed, he re-entered the little hut. He threw himself down on the pile of mats. He covered his eyes with his hands. He tried to visualize what must happen. It had been dinned into his ears for a lifetime.

For a few days, perhaps even for a week or two, after he had taken all his tablets, there would probably be no perceptible change. Then he would begin gradually to slow down. He would find it harder and harder to awaken mornings. Then all that ghastly horror of degeneration would set in again. The new course of The Change would affect him, too, even more blastingly, if less rapidly, now that its victim was to be his adult and not his infant personality.

Marian! He groaned aloud, a groan choked suddenly by main force lest it disturb her sleeping peacefully over there on the mats in her corner of the little hut. He drew himself painfully to his feet, and stood looking down upon her as she slept. It was like a farewell.

It was too much, this ravaging of all his hopes! This terrible fulfilment, in the very midst of his happiness, of all his life's direst dreads! But he wasted little time in anything like self-pity. It was Marian who filled his thoughts. He could not tell her! In his present weakened state he visualized a frightful purgatory, stretching out before him, and before Marian, when that change of Hell should set in here on a stage from which he might not so much as step for respite into the wings; a stage upon which he must otherwise play out the part of his incredible degradation before her horror-stricken eyes. Better, far better, to destroy himself. . . .

A fresh aspect of the horror loomed before him, blackly. As the terrible spell wrought itself out, his own mind's powers would weaken, his faculties become numbed, and he would himself fail to understand the course of the disintegration that would be taking place within him. Then Marian, if unwarned beforehand, must witness with the same helpless terror that had set its mark on the lives of his young parents in those black days, his gradual and sickening change into Caliban. . .

4

DAY by way he watched his capsules diminish. At the end of the sixth day, when only two were left, he suffered a revulsion. He would save these until some indications of the change appeared! When these came he would know of them before anyone else because he would be expecting them. In this way he would extend the period of his normality as long as possible, and then. . .

After that, life would be one growing terror concealed from Marian so long as his self-control should be left to him to exercise. Marian was occupied in alternations of sorrow over the loss of their shipmates and the eager happiness of a child confronted unexpectedly with an imagined paradise.

He went through one day without the thyroid: the first day within his

recollection. The next day, at noon, engrained habit prevailing over his resolution, he took a tablet. The day following, after reasoning the problem out afresh, he swallowed his last tablet and flung the metal box far out among the creaming breakers of the nearest reef.

He stood, looking after it out to sea. Far beyond the breakers, beyond the great expanse of blue ocean which was their background, there swam into the scope of his vision the clear-cut outline of a spar. He lost it. He shaded his eyes with both hands against the intolerable glare. Again he picked it out standing up against the horizon. He wondered why he had not noticed it before. This was because, he reasoned, occupied with his introspections, he had glanced only indifferently out to sea. Besides, he had probably, he told himself, not looked in that precise direction. One looked out to sea from any spot on the tiny, almost circular, coral island.

Down under that spar, if chance had been only reasonably kind, lay the hull which supported it, and in the hull reposed in small, watertight cartons the thyroids which meant life, sanity, Marian!

Then, as he looked, his heart bounding with hope, all his young instincts stimulated to vigorous action, he saw, very faintly and indistinctly at that great distance, the unmistakable sign of the sea-wolves of the South Pacific —the rakish dorsal fins of great sharks. He looked long at them as they moved about in the vicinity of the spar, and shuddering, he turned inland and walked back to the hut.

Here on the island there was no means of procuring even crude thyroid. There were no animals. The atoll was utterly self-contained. Its simple inhabitants subsisted on fruit and fish. There was no settlement within hundreds of miles.

He interviewed the English-speaking islander. It had been the chance of a ship's crew putting in for water that had taken this man on his travels. Did such crews ever put in nowadays? Very seldom. Once in a year, perhaps, or two years—who could tell? The lull was a long chance. The sharks would go away when they had cleared up what was edible from the wreckage out there. At any rate there was the possibility of a solution out there; a solution first vaguely imagined, horrifically rejected, then avidly taken up again as Renwick tossed through the interminable tropic night on his coco matting, the night of the day on which he had taken his last capsule.

There was no help to be procured. He had sounded his friend the islander on the subject of summoning the men of the settlement with their primitive outriggers to go out there and loot the wreck. But the islander had said, indifferently, that there was no hurry about that. Some of it might come in anyway, as Renwick and Marian had come in, almost miraculously, through the jagged reefs. The sharks were thick out there now, and they would remain for some time. Time enough to go out there when they had dispersed and made it possible to dive! They might remain a week or a month. Who could explain the avidity or the patience of a shark? They would follow ships day after day in these seas, apparently subsisting on nothing, waiting! There was something in that wreck they were waiting for now, and they would remain until they got it. Besides, it was far, almost too far for outriggers!

Renwick tried to argue. It was not so very far. One could see the spar. The islander only smiled. There appeared to be something unaccountably amusing to him in Renwick's idea of distance. But he did not explain. Perhaps what was clear enough to him was beyond his limited powers of expression, and realizing this, he only smiled.

Renwick was baffled. It appeared hopeless. But he laid his plans for his last resort with a steady mind. Marian must be spared at every cost. He broached to her the possibility of his reaching the sunken hull by swimming. He said nothing of the sharks, nothing of his conversation with the islander. He opened up the subject tentatively, delicately, with every resource of his strained finesse. He set her mind easily at rest about his going by harping upon the gentleness and kindly hospitality of the islanders. She would not mind remaining alone with them for a while?

Marian acquiesced easily, admiring her man's accustomed resource. Of course he might go out there if he wished! Why not? But he must not stay too long. He must come back soon—soon! He took her in his arms.

Four days later, as he awoke, he found that Marian was looking, smilingly, into his face. She had been shaking him. It was at least an hour after their usual time for rising.

Then he knew that *it* was beginning.

Almost at once he told Marian of his intention to swim out to the spar that afternoon. Of course she knew he was a wonderful swimmer! Wouldn't it be rather far, though? Her attention was diverted by the approach of an amber-colored baby, who waddled toward her, soft little murmurings on its lips, its tiny hands laden with hibiscus blooms.

She went with him down to the beach, his body glistening with coconut oil, a great coconut knife hanging by a lanyard about his neck. She waved to him when he stopped to tread water, turning about and shouting: "Good-bye." She could just hear his voice faintly because of the distant roar of the surf, a roar which rolled in for miles, even from the farthest breakers where a lone spar still hung aslant across the line of the horizon.

Then he swam straight out toward the spar where shadowy, black fins moved stealthily upon the mirror surface of the Pacific.

5

ONCE alone in the deep water, he settled himself to a steady, distance-devouring stroke. He had put everything in his past life definitely behind him. That now held for him, he knew, nothing that it was not altogether best to abandon. He would accomplish two ends in one, by failing to return. He would avoid the frightful process of disintegration and (infinitely nearer to his soul's desire) he would thus spare Marian all that concentrated horror which had so fearfully affected the lives of his parents. He was doing her, he reasoned, moreover, no wrong in depriving her of himself. He was only forcing the exchange between a horrible and long-drawn-out deprivation, and this sudden one which by comparison was merciful and kind.

His purpose was clear and definite. He would swim straight out to where the sea wolves moved restlessly back and forth about the wreck, and kill and rend with his great knife until he was overcome. It was not even suicide! There was a possibility that the sharks might not attack him, but would disappear upon his arrival. He knew, fragmentarily, something of sharks. One could never be certain what they might do. It was also possible that, even if attacked, the killing of one or two might divert the others: just as in Siberia travelers pursued by wolves sometimes escaped by shooting a wolf or two and so delaying the pack, which would stop to tear and devour.

He swam on steadily, these ideas uppermost in his mind. After what seemed a very long time, he raised

himself, treading water, to make sure of his direction. He located the spar, straight in line with his course. To his surprize it seemed no nearer than when he had stood on the beach. This he attributed to the queer tricks of refraction, and resumed his swim.

After another long, steady period of progress in the same direction he repeated his lookout. Again he reassured himself as to his course. Once more he swam on, puzzled that the spar still seemed so distant. It was almost uncanny.

Suddenly, as this calamity usually comes, even to an expert swimmer, he began to tire. He rested, floating, for several minutes, and then, treading water, again oriented himself by the spar. He could perceive no difference in its appearance of nearness. For all the progress he had made he might as well have been standing on the beach! Then it came to him suddenly that his disintegration must have been making strides far more rapidly than he had imagined possible. He must have got only a little way from the island! How good it was—what a mercy!—that it had this form, and not some other that would have been apparent to Marian.

Wearily he trod water again, and, locating the spar, turned himself directly around in the certainty of finding the island just at hand, his one hope being that he had got far enough away so that he might drown quietly here out of Marian's view. He hoped she might not have remained on the beach. If so she would be puzzled at his slight progress, and would be watching him intently. . . He could never reach the spar. He could not, of course, go back. The solution rested upon his not returning, unless (how absurd it seemed!) he should, by that saving chance which by its casuistry saved his act from deliberate self-destruction, manage in some way to drive off the sharks, and, by a lucky dive, succeed in lighting upon one of his cartons. . .

He could not see the island! He shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked carefully. Could that be it? It must be. There was no other island within hundreds of miles. But—could he possibly have come so far? The island appeared to him almost low on the horizon. He must have been swimming steadily for hours. He could see the island in its entirety; perspective had made it small and compact. And he had dreaded Marian's being on the beach to see!

Infinitely troubled, all his reasoning thrown askew, he rolled over upon his back and floated, trying to think consecutively. There was only one explanation for the apparently stationary spar. That must be the very common sea-mirage. That was what the islander had meant; what he could not explain! He, too, had seen the spar, had had it pointed out to him; and he had said it was almost too far for a company of men in the outriggers! How could he, in his decadent condition, have come such a distance as this toward it?

Then he recalled that he had been basing this present idea of decadence, of having covered only a short distance, on the fact that the spar had not appeared to grow in size. But that, as he had just rightly reasoned, was mirage! Reason allowed only one answer to the riddle. He had actually covered the great distance the time spent in the water would have permitted him to swim while in perfect condition.

He thought of his intended battle with the sharks. He shuddered, and imagined a shark just behind him, then laughed aloud at this fancy. Suddenly he sobered. He had laughed —laughed! A fitting conclusion to a perfectly normal sequence of ideas. He reasoned with himself afresh. What was the matter with him? This manner of thought, this great swim—

these were not the ways of a cretin. He knew all about cretins! It was clearly, rather, what might be expected of a normal, healthily tired young man in magnificent physical condition, now floating for rest in this deep, very comfortable water, of high buoyancy; out here in the Pacific on a fool's errand.

That errand! What had he been thinking of? To attempt to do battle with a school of sharks, armed with a coconut knife! He was a fool! To be out here when he might be on shore—with Marian!

He remembered, with a queer feeling in his head, how he had planned never to see her again. That was because of The Change which had begun to come upon him. The Change! Nonsense! There had been no change. No man could have traveled this distance from shore and kept his direction as he had done unless he were in the very pink of condition, every nerve and sinew and muscle, and a perfectly sound brain, functioning and co-ordinating with a precision that spelled perfection. Why, he had actually been obliged to hunt about to locate the island, he had come out so far!

He floated for a few minutes more, the soft, invigorating water lapping gently over him, his hands clasped under his head. Tentatively he rubbed himself over with his hands. Every muscle was responding, working splendidly. He was not even fagged, but only slightly winded by an exceptionally long and vigorous swim.

He began to swim back toward the island. He went slowly at first, because now it was only a question of ordinary judgment to conserve his strength.

Strength! He had almost never put out his full strength! He shook his head vigorously in sheer exuberance, blowing the water away from his mouth right and left as he cut easily and swiftly through it.

THE conviction grew upon him, as he swam, it seemed, more and more easily and strongly in a straight line toward the island, that there was nothing to mark him off from any normal man—from "any *other* normal man," he repeated his old phrase to himself. What if he had, all these years, been deluding himself through bondservice to a fear which had no longer any substantial foundation; fear derived from his father and his dear mother, and Dr. Sturgis?

There was nothing to distinguish him from an average man,—nothing, that was, except his magnificent strength, energy, and endurance. None but a normal man could possess and retain this command over himself, his mind and body. It was no wonder, though, that he had given in to it so long. It had been dinned into his ears since as long ago as he could remember. He had simply acquiesced in a wrong idea, that was all. He had been frightened of a bogle, like a child! But he would give in to it no longer. He had left that ancient bogle of the imagination out there where he had been floating and thinking; left it out there to toss about or sink to the bottom. The sharks could have it! He laughed aloud in sheer glee, knowing that he was released from that old bondage of an overstressed idea. He swam on and on.

He walked up the beach at last, slowly, and a little stiffly and wearily from the tremendous swim, the water running in crooked trickles down his well-oiled body. The knife swung awkwardly against his broad chest. It annoyed him, and he unslung it and carried it in his hand, dangling by the lanyard. Then a glint of iridescent green and blue caught his eye as something moved across an exposed rock and caught the light from the

afternoon sun now slanting far down toward the western horizon. It was a huge land-crab.

He hurled the knife at it, throwing from the point. It was a long throw, but the heavy knife, whirling as it flew, struck with a metallic clash fairly among the great crab's awkward legs. With a shout Renwick ran to his quarry, which, on its remaining sound legs, was attempting to drag itself away.

He picked it up, gingerly, and tied it to the lanyard, and then, with it swinging beside him, continued on his way.

He met Marian playing with some tiny children, her hair aureoled with flaming *flamboyant*. He held up the crab.

"The only booty from that voyage, I'm sorry to say," he called out to her, "and I didn't get *him* till after I was back on shore again. It was altogether too far. I'll have to try it in an outrigger some day."

"Have you been swimming all this time?" asked Marian. "I was beginning to worry about you a little!"

"Never worry about me! Lord, Marian, but I'm hungry! I haven't had a thing to eat since this morning."

"Bring along your crab, then," retorted Marian, rising from among the babies. "I wish I had some mayonnaise! My goodness, what a blessing it is that I'm a 'natural cook.' I never saw such a caveman for food."

Together they walked toward their hut, the great crab still struggling at the end of his string for the freedom he would never know again.

When the "natural cook" had done her work and the crab, as such, had ceased to exist, Renwick, leaning back, addressed his wife.

"I hope you won't have to do this sort of thing very long, dear. Any time, of course, a ship may put in for water. Old 'Parmenides' tells me there's one nearly every year; and they've never gone longer than two years without one."

"But it's perfect! I could live here forever—well, a year anyhow."

She placed her chin on her hands and looked at him, her eyes like stars.

"Then I'm satisfied," said Renwick, as he rose to stretch mightily the growing stiffness of his overtaxed muscles. "Let the ship sail in when she's ready. I'm dead-tired after that swim. Do you mind if I turn in?"

"I should think you would want to turn in, after that swim, and after last night. Do you realize that you sat out there in the moonlight, all by yourself, until after 1 o'clock by my wrist watch? It's never missed a tick, all through everything."

She shuddered a little and returned to the subject of his dissipation:

"You may remember I had to wake you up this morning. You had only five hours of sleep!"

JUST before he drifted into sleep that night he thought of Caliban! He remembered his frightful delineation as the frontispiece of an old, leather-bound copy of "The Tempest." It was something like that which had been at the back of his mind—his possible metamorphosis into Caliban! So he had phrased it to himself. Caliban!

And now? What was it in Ariel's song? Something about a Change?

> He hath suffered a sea change
> Into something rich and strange!

The sea—the blessed sea! It had healed him, healed the wounds of his mind. He drifted into dreamless sleep with the sound of its distant thundering in his ears, like a great, kindly benediction.

THE WOLF OF THE CAMPAGNA

by Harry Bailey

IRAMIRO d'ORCO, whom men call the Wolf of the Campagna on account of the evil deeds of my master Cesare Borgia, Duke of Romagna, am about to write an account of my last adventure so that all may know why I died. I live now; but, with the setting sun, men will come for me, and, in some manner, I shall pay all my debts to the God I have wronged.

I dread it not, for is not Maria dead? Perhaps she will obtain pardon for me; then together will we wander through the marble palaces, hand in hand. But there may be no mercy for so great a sinner as I. I have sinned, deeply; but ever at another man's dictates. I only know I want death and Maria. For the rest I can but hope, I can but pray.

But my time runs short. I will begin; for the sun is high in the heavens and I have much to write before he sets.

Rome lay sweltering in the glare of an August day. Cesare Borgia was staying with his sister Lucrezia at Naples; but he had ordered me to await his return in Rome. Huge as was the Borgia palace, few of its inmates stirred during the hot day. The servants were busy in their own quarters, and my bravos, in the courtyard, slept or played interminable games of dice.

At last evening fell and I was able, though the risk was still great, to enjoy the outside freshness.

Wrapping my cloak tightly round chin and shoulders and pulling my hat over my eyes, I sallied forth into the open air. The shimmering Tiber lay bathed in gold and blood as the gorgeous sunset deepened, but little I recked a scene so beautiful. Even in the city, ruled as it was by the Borgias, my life was not worth a moment's purchase should my identity be discovered, so I keenly scrutinized each passer-by and kept ready hands on dagger and sword. Thus I passed through the streets until I drew near Tiber's banks, and sat down on the grass that clothed its yellow margin.

Suddenly to my vacant ears there came a scream, another, and yet another, before I realized what was afoot. Leaping up, I hurried forward until I could see a young girl, of exquisite beauty, struggling in the grasp of three of Tiber's rogues.

I stole onward, silently, ghostlike. When ten paces away, I bounded forward, and my dagger reached the heart of the nearest rascal. He died without a groan. The others loosed the girl and turned quickly, their

daggers flashing in the moonlight; but I had whipped out my great sword, and at the sight of it they melted away like early mists before the sun.

Then I turned to the girl. Her beauty stunned me. She was frail and willowy, with dark hair and eyes that shone like fire, lambent, smoldering. Her coloring was perfect, and the parted red lips gleamed enticingly like ripening peaches on a sun-kissed wall.

The color came and went in her cheeks as she thanked me for my assistance. Her name, she said, was Maria Stefano. She had been visiting a friend in Rome and was on her way home to Cesena when attacked. My heart throbbed with joy as I offered to escort her on her journey.

We talked—what did we not talk about?—that night and in the days that followed. I cannot tell the tale of my love; how I wooed and how—praise be to the Virgin!—I won. Yes; she the beautiful, the incomparable, loved me and we were as happy as Neapolitan boat-boys. Ah! how I wished then and in the ensuing days that I bore a name less known, less hated! How could I tell her my name? Had I done so she would have screamed in affright and buried her head; for did not everybody say that I gave people the "evil eye"?

WE WERE to be wed within three weeks when, one day, old Tomaso brought me word that the Borgia was on his way to Rome.

When Cesare came he was in one of his most jovial moods. He sent for me at once and I noticed the smile at the corners of the hard, straight lips. His eyes, too, dark and piercing, seemed softer, and the heavy chin, rugged as a defiant rock, was molded into more sensuous lines than usual.

"Well, Ramiro," he said, "how is Rome?"

"Hot, my lord," I answered, "hot and dull."

"Hot weather must suit you then, my Ramiro," he retorted, "for you look very happy. What have you been doing, man? That long visage of yours is brighter than I have ever seen it. Out with the tale. Those painted fops of Lucrezia have bored me to death, the cursed poltroons."

His anxiety on my behalf flattered me; but first I must know the result of his own schemes to drive the French out of our beloved Italy.

"Won't they help us, my lord?"

"No," said Cesare, shortly, and the thundercloud began to mar the soft lines of his face.

He pondered a little.

"Let that wait," he cried at last. "I want to hear your tale, Ramiro. You have one to tell, I know."

Then, fool that I was, thrice-accursed fool, I blurted out the tale of my love for Maria. I raved to him, who would have slain his own father for a pretty face, of her matchless beauty, her peachlike skin, her raven hair. The good God should have killed me before I had begun my tale; but then, I loved him, and few could resist Cesare when he was jovial.

Whilst I was praising her beauty, Cesare screened his face from my eyes; but when I had finished he looked up and, with one of his rare, winning smiles, said:

"I shall lose you, Ramiro."

"No, no, my lord," I answered; "I will never leave you."

"Perhaps so, my Ramiro; but you love her better."

I could make no answer.

He smiled again, but sadly this time.

"All desert me," he said; "but you have been faithful. Show me your future bride, Ramiro, and I myself will come to the wedding."

I was speechless with joy.

"I will bring her tomorrow, my lord," I answered, and bowed myself out.

Early on the morrow I prepared to fetch my beloved to see the Borgia. But before I went I was forced to crave audience of him that he might know I had hidden my name from her.

His face grew black as I told my reasons, and I watched his fingers closing and unclosing on his tiny dagger.

"Beware, Ramiro," he said at last. "A lover's leap may reach the stars, but rarely does he stay there."

"She must never know, my lord," I pleaded.

"As you will," he answered, negligently, but there was something in his voice that roused my lurking fears.

AT FIRST Maria refused to see the hated Borgia; but when I explained how Cesare could make or mar my fortunes, she made no further ado.

Never shall I forget how beautiful she looked when we stood in the great marble portico of the Borgia palace, awaiting Cesare.

My heart sank when I saw his bold, black eyes seeking hers in open admiration, and once I caught his glance at me and quailed, for it read murder. But soon his mood changed and he became the kind, courteous nobleman whom no one could resist.

"My child," he said to Maria, "you are going to be happy. He loves you, I know; and you, do you love him?"

"Yes, my lord," breathed Maria.

Cesare sighed.

"I would that I could forget these cares of state," he said, "and learn to love, too. Ambition and power placed together in one scale will not outweigh love."

Then, with that sweet smile he could summon at need, he continued: "But I bore you. Let me know when your wedding is, and I will come."

"My lord!" we murmured in gratitude.

"Wear this for me," he cried and, taking a gold necklace from his bosom, placed it round Maria's white throat.

On the long homeward journey Maria was full of Cesare's virtues and I, too, praised him, though less recklessly, for I could not forget the murderous glance I had intercepted.

Two days later Cesare sent for me. He lay sprawled out in his great chair and his face was black but for a vivid streak that marred the contour of his right cheek. He eyed me malignantly.

"Ho, d'Orco," he cried, "that girl of yours is a vixen. I saw her yesterday at Cesena and offered to kiss her. She marked me all right."

His voice was silken, but I could pierce beneath the mask. My brain was on fire with indignation, but I saw his face and waited. More was to come.

"Hi, Tomaso," cried the Borgia, "tell Bacco I want him at once."

Bacco came quickly. Cesare addressed him in quiet accents, but he reminded me very much then of a tiger about to spring on its prey.

"Bacco, was it you who laughed yesterday when the girl scratched me at Cesena?"

Bacco, a stalwart soldier, looked frightened and murmured: "No, Excellency."

"You lie!" cried Cesare, as the thundercloud completely enveloped his face. "Come here and give me your hand."

He was smiling now, but the eyes were gleaming dangerously.

"See, Bacco," he cried, "I put my hand in yours. Now—squeeze."

Bacco squeezed while Cesare laughed.

"Harder, man, harder," he cried, and Bacco gripped his hardest.

Then Cesare laughed loud and gripped while Bacco squirmed. The silence of the room was suddenly broken by a snap. Bacco reeled backwards with his hand broken.

"My dear Bacco," cried Borgia, "you are a weakling. Go now, man," he snarled, "and if you laugh again I'll spit you as I would a bird."

"A useful lesson," said Cesare to me as Bacco went out. "But now to business. Maria Stefano is a beautiful girl, and I, Cesare Borgia, have fallen in love with her."

I was dumfounded. My heart became as lead.

"But what about me, Excellency?" I stammered.

"Servants must give place to their masters, d'Orco," replied Cesare.

"I never—"

Then I saw his face, where all the pent-up passion of ages seemed stored.

"What?" he shouted.

Coward as I was, I quailed.

"Nothing, Excellency," I quavered.

"My God, man, if you stand in my way, I'll—"

He stopped.

"You see this ring?" he added in a quieter tone, as he slipped from his finger a plain gold band set with a magnificent turquoise. "It contains just enough poison to kill a man in four days; and all that time he will be in torture. Do you wish to wear it?"—with a cruel smile.

"No, no, Excellency," I cried.

"Well, d'Orco," he thundered, "if you thwart me in the merest iota you shall wear it. Now perhaps you understand," he added. "Here are your instructions. Tonight, yourself and five of my men will go to Cesena. All must wear masks; the horses' hoofs must be padded; there must be no noise. You will go to the Stefano house and bring back Maria. If any one should dare to oppose you, kill him. You are ready to do it?" as he saw my countenance distorted with anguish.

I thought for a moment and quickly realized that by my going Maria might have a chance for her life, whereas if I should refuse we should both die, I murdered, she of shame.

"I agree, Excellency," I replied.

"Good! Be ready at dusk," he answered. But he eyed me craftily as I left the room.

WHEN dusk fell that evening the five bravos and I were ready mounted at the castle gate. I did not stay to examine them. What was the use, since all had had their instructions, I knew.

"Ready?" I whispered.

"Si, signor."

"Forward, then!"

Quietly, black demons on black steeds, well-nigh invisible, almost inaudible, we stole through the byways of the silent city, making for the uphill route that led to Cesena.

Once on the high road we stretched out our horses, and the plan I had already evolved began to mature. I knew Cesare too well to doubt his intentions. Even now he had probably set one of the men to watch me lest I should play him false. Yes, my plan was the only one feasible. I must die, but Maria would be saved.

My mind made up, I rode forward more light-heartedly until we reached the outskirts of Cesena. Our pace slackened, and we passed along the road like wraiths until we reached the Stefano cottage. How my heart beat when I saw the dear little place in which I had spent so many hours of happiness! Now that happiness was but a broken shell. Yet, if by dying I could save her from the certain shame that awaited her in Borgia's palace, my ignoble life would have a glorious end. It was well worth striving for.

I gave orders to dismount and close in on the cottage. Carefully I adjusted my mask, which the wind had loosened somewhat, and, striding for-

ward, knocked at the door. It was opened by Maria herself. I brushed past her and was followed by my five bravos, the last of whom pushed my beloved into the room before following himself.

Old Stefano jumped up and drew down his old sword. His wife screamed for help. Maria herself, who was made of sterner stuff, stood in a corner, looking as white as the driven snow. In a moment all was excitement. I went quietly to Maria and whispered her name. She started.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, dearest," I answered. "The Borgia has compelled me to come. Your beauty has inflamed his bestial passions, and he has ordered me to carry you to him."

"You, you whom I loved and who I thought loved me, to do such a thing!" cried Maria.

"Hush, dear," I whispered. "Can't you see yet? If I had refused to come, Borgia would have slain me and sent someone else. I hold out hopes of an escape for you, however, but now" (I glanced round warily and saw that old Stefano and his wife were dead, while one of my bravos was lying prostrate on the earthen floor) "silence!"

The place was a veritable shambles. Hardened though I was to such sights, I felt sick, and Maria fainted; so I picked her up and made for the door, motioning my men to follow. We mounted, and I, in pursuance of my plan, placed her on the spare horse and rode alongside to hold her up.

I ordered the men to ride on before, and, somewhat to my surprize, they obeyed me. The cool air of evening soon revived the fainting girl, but when she became conscious, her state was pitiable. She cried for her father and mother. She saw continually before her eyes the little room with its blood-bespattered walls and its dead occupants.

"Hush, dearest," I whispered. "You must control yourself now, for if you fail to escape within the next half hour, the Borgia will hold you."

That aroused her.

"Never!" she exclaimed, and I saw the blood course to her cheeks. "That cursed libertine shall never hold me alive!"

"Neither shall he hold you dead," I responded.

"Tell me what to do."

"Draw out my dagger quietly and stab me through the arm. You must do it," I said as I saw her wince, "or Cesare will kill me. Then turn and ride for your life."

There was no answer.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Faster, men!" I shouted, and the front quartet began to draw away. "Now!" I whispered.

She drew the dagger quickly, and a red-hot shaft passed through my right forearm. Then she turned and was gone. I waited for some moments, before shouting to my comrades: "Hi! that cursed vixen has stabbed me and ridden off!"

They came back helter-skelter, and their faces were pitiable to see. Fear, naked and unashamed, reigned supreme. We all followed her trail, but saw no sign of her. Once in the woods to our right I thought I heard a scream, but it was not repeated, and my men on being questioned said they had heard nothing.

Two hours later we drew reign in Borgia's courtyard. The men were sullen and eyed me askance, but I was happy, for had I not saved my sweetheart, even though I myself should soon meet the dread reaper?

To my great surprize old Tomaso said that Cesare would see no one that night and ordered me to place the girl where I liked. That alone should have made me suspicious, but never till the very end did I suspect the depths of Borgia's ingenuity.

I TOLD Tomaso nothing and retired to rest, but little sleep visited my couch that night. I was up early next morning, or rather today—I can not realize time now; an eternity has been crowded into seconds. The bravos eyed me sullenly, and I saw more than one make a significant gesture as I passed him. They knew Borgia's penalty for failure, these men.

In a short time Cesare sent for me, and I saw he was in a good temper. He was lolling indolently in his chair and idly fingering the inevitable dagger.

"It's a pity we both love that girl, Ramiro," he said; "for you have always been a good servant. I suppose you brought her last night?"

Now was the supreme moment. I told him of our silent ride, and of the deaths of Stefano and his wife.

"Good," muttered Cesare; "there will be no witnesses. I shouldn't like it to get to the ears of my august father the pope."

This last was said sneeringly.

"Of the death of the bravo—"

Borgia smiled and glanced at me keenly.

"Pish!" he said. "A mere nothing; such men are cheap."

"Of my preparations for the homeward journey—"

Cesare commended my prudence. And then I felt my face whiten; I knew my voice was shaking.

"Go on, man!" cried Borgia.

I could not speak. Silently I rolled up my sleeve and showed him the wound made by the dagger.

"She escaped?" cried Cesare in an awful voice. "Say it, man, if you dare; you let her escape?"

I nodded assent, for I could not speak. His eyes glared in their ferocity; his features worked in a paroxysm of anger. Once I thought he was about to hurl his dagger at me. Would he had done so!

"Well," he cried at last, but in a calmer tone, "you did your best, d'Orco, and as you have rarely failed I will forgive you."

My heart jumped for joy. I leapt forward and kissed his hand.

"Come, now," he said, "I brought a precious jewel home last night. It is the finest in the world, so I have put it in one of the turrets for safety. I will show it to you."

I followed him, bewildered at the sudden change. Up the winding stairs we passed until we came to the turret room. Cesare drew the key from his pocket and unlocked the door. Seated on a rough oaken bench underneath the window was a girl. Surely I knew that hair, that form, those tiny feet!

"Permit me," said Cesare with a mocking laugh, "to make you known to Maria Stefano."

The room whirled round. I grasped and caught nothing.

"Oh, God!" I groaned. "I would that I could die!"

"You will wish that many times before this day is out," warned Cesare. "Poor fool, to think that you could dupe me!" he laughed mockingly.

"How did it happen?" I said to Maria wonderingly.

"How did it happen?" repeated Borgia, his black face twitching with mingled joy and rage. "I—I, Cesare Borgia, went with you last night. I was the man whom you left for dead in the Stefano homestead. I followed you stealthily until you let the girl escape. I caught her in the woods. Here she is."

"I did hear a scream then?" I murmured dully.

"You did," said Cesare grimly, "and now you will hear some more. Stand back, you fool," as I saw his purpose and stepped between, "or I'll have you skinned alive."

I quailed before his look. I am not an arrant coward. No man dare face him when his temper is aroused.

He went to the girl and, bending over her, kissed her passionately several times. She lay quiescent in his arms for some moments, and then fought like a wild tigress. Cesare loosed her when the blood from his lacerated face streamed into his eyes and blinded him temporarily. She turned to me and said quietly:

"Good-bye, beloved. We shall meet, perhaps, beyond." And she looked upward.

Even then I did not realize her purpose. With a bound she reached the narrow opening that served as a window, and forcing her slender frame through, plunged down to fall with a sickening thud on the courtyard stones beneath.

I gazed down and saw her lying lifeless on the hard flags below, and my heart died within me. A cold rage possessed me toward her murderer, and I fingered longingly the dagger that was hidden beneath my doublet. Then a mighty force hurled me from the window against the stone walls of the room. Cesare had understood and taken my place. I drew out the dagger quietly, and stepping softly, stood behind his broad back and struck, with a muttered: "Die, murderer!"

Chink! chink! as metal met metal; then the dagger point fell broken to the ground, for, early though it was, Cesare was wearing his shirt of mail. The Borgia turned and struck me down with his fist.

Then for the first time in my life I saw that man of stone and iron weep. Stretching out his arms from the window he cried in a voice of utter anguish: "Gone, my love, gone! Cold and dead! You might have loved me had you waited. I loved you from the moment when that poor fool brought you to the house. I would have given the world for you. I would have relinquished my ambitious hopes, hopes of a future kingdom, hopes of being a world ruler. I would have been happy as a humble tiller of the soil could you have loved me."

His mood changed.

"All my highest plans seem ever to crumble," he muttered gloomily, "but" (his voice rang deep with suppressed feeling) "I will make the world pay. The whole of Italy shall ring with the name of Cesare Borgia. I will make kings my servants, and wo to those who step between myself and my ambitions! As for you, poor fool," he continued, glancing down carelessly at me, "you whom she loved and for whose sake she died, I could watch you cut to pieces and laugh."

I looked at him steadily. I felt no fear.

"But no, you have been a faithful servant, so your end shall be a swift one. Die you must, though. Your presence would ever remind me of her."

At the doorway he paused.

"Farewell, d'Orco," he cried, "a long farewell. You will die tonight."

I was left alone.

I have seized the opportunity to write a full account of my end so that posterity may know me and judge. I am ready. I shall hide these papers underneath a stone. Some one may find them in years to be.

It grows dark. I can write no more. Farewell, light! Maria, beloved, I shall soon come.

HISTORIANS of the life of Cesare Borgia say:

"The inhabitants of Cesena were surprized to see early one morning the form of a man hanging from the gallows in the market place. It was the body of Ramiro d'Orco, the infamous lieutenant of Cesare Borgia. The whole neighborhood rejoiced at the death of the 'Wolf of the Campagna,' and the expression was often heard that now Borgia would reform."

I COULD not sleep that night. My body was tired, but my soul was wide-awake. My soul was rebellious. It seemed striving to break loose from its imprisoning body, bent upon making some strange tour of discovery, an exploration of the unknown.

My physical being shrank from contact with the unnatural; my spiritual being yearned toward it.

For some minutes a bitter fight was waged within me, earthly and spiritual lives alike struggling for mastery. My brain burned like molten lava; my heart leapt within me with an awful excitement. The strain imposed upon my senses was terrific, the pain I was enduring unutterable.

Suddenly my body weakened; its powers of resistance diminished. And, seemingly realizing its opportunity, the soul sprang forward, hurled itself with horrible force against the enclosing barrier of flesh, and burst forth. My brain and heart, clinging to the spirit, passed out along with it; soul, life and mind alike deserted the earthly dwelling.

More swiftly than thought itself, I shot into midair and dashed on into unknown space, cleaving the ether.

Far out across the universe I sped, leaving behind me stars and moon, sun, earth and planets.

At last I had arrived at the very edge of the world, and looking down, saw beneath me a great abyss.

Far, far below me, hung a vast curtain of smoke-clouds, concealing from my view the underworld.

Spurred on by insatiable curiosity, I flung myself downward through the clouds, and penetrating the thick mass, found myself—in HELL!

Yes, I was in the pit itself. All around me were tall steep walls, stretching upward to meet the ceiling of clouds. The whole area reeked with the smell of brimstone, and underneath me, scorching me with their fetid breath, were huge fires.

Gathered around the fires, and feeding them from time to time, was an army of fiery fiends. These were hideously formed, their fingers armed with long, poniard-pointed, red claws; their bodies squat and misshapen; their short legs deformed; their flat feet cloven.

These dreadful fiends were many-handed, and in each hand they held souls of the damned. Stretching out their snaky arms, they dangled the souls above the flames, toasting them to a brown crisp while the victims shrieked and screamed in torment. At

sight of their awful agony, and at sound of their piteous cries for mercy, the fiends laughed shrilly, the whole dark pit ringing with their blood-curdling, unhallowed mirth.

SUDDENLY there sounded another laugh, ten thousand times louder than the others, and dwarfing them as a Titan overtops a pigmy, shaking the very pit-walls with its vibrations.

I was almost completely deafened by the hellish laughter, and it was some minutes before I had sufficiently recovered to dare look in the direction from which the sound had come.

Even when at last I summoned courage to gaze that way, I could at first see but little, for the whole center of the pit was wrapped in black smoke.

Then all at once the wreaths of smoke were dispelled, and my eyes were blasted by the most awful sight an astral body ever witnessed.

There, seated on a throne made of living souls of the lost, was Satan himself. And if the sight of the smaller fiends had struck me with terror, then the beholding of the Arch-Demon utterly paralyzed me. Great Heavens! What a monster he was! Blacker than the pit itself; incalculably larger than any of his followers; most weirdly and grotesquely shaped; he was indeed the very incarnation of all that is evil and damnable!

Nor shall I attempt to describe the ruler of the under regions in minute detail, fearing for the reason of my readers should I do this.

But the things that struck me as most terrible about the Master of Hell were his huge black hands. The long, thick fingers were covered over with large spikes. These tapered to needle-like points, and were barbed.

Impaled on the barbed thorns were more of the damned. And it had been the sight of his helpless, miserable victims writhing and wriggling beneath his gaze, that had caused Satan to roar with laughter.

Then, looking a little way beyond the black throne, I saw something else. Running across the pit between throne and wall, was a sharp sword.

In one side of the pit's floor, below the sword, ran a wide river of liquid fire. Following the swift current with my eye, I saw that after running some distance it suddenly dashed over a precipice into a seething whirlpool.

On the other side of the sword, with his immense head turned upward and jaws widely distended, was a dog-shaped thing, which instinctively I knew to be Cerberus, guardian of the pit.

In form, Cerberus was not unlike the watch-dog of Greek mythology, save that instead of three heads he possessed only one, and his mouth, instead of being fanged, was lined with two rows of blunt molars. An abnormally long red tongue of living flame hung down from between his black, foam-flecked jaws, and his menacing eyes were likewise made of flame.

NOW, watching Satan, I saw him place one of those poor damned souls upright upon the razor-edged sword and start it upon its awful journey across the blade. Swaying from side to side, it advanced until it had almost reached the center of the blade. Then, losing its balance, it uttered one hair-raising screech of terror and plunged down into the red stream of liquid fire, which bore it away to the precipice, over which it was dashed with stupendous force into the churning whirlpool below. What became of it after that I do not know, for it did not reappear.

Then the demon took another victim and sent it out across the blade. But this one walked less confidently than the first, shaking from head to foot as it tried to preserve its equilibrium. Nor could it do so long, for its eyes looking down fell upon the

dog, and it jumped in fright right down in front of the mighty brute.

Perhaps you have seen a toad shoot forward its tongue and snap up a fly. In just such manner did Cerberus scoop up the soul that had fallen. Like lightning the flaming red tongue darted forward, caught the soul upon its tip, and snapped it between those two rows of grinding molars. Crunch, crunch, crunch went the great teeth.

Until then, I had (though with extreme difficulty) managed to repress my emotions, but the sight of that wretched, damned soul being ground piecemeal in that terrible mill caused me to utter a sudden horrified scream.

Hearing the scream, the whole assembly of fiends looked up. As they beheld me, an expression of malignant joy overspread their countenances, and, screeching with mad desire, they rose into the air and clutched at me.

Fear lent me additional speed, and eluding their deadly grasp, I threw myself out of the pit, through the clouds, into the space beyond.

Believing myself safe, now I had escaped the inferno, I slackened speed a little, thinking no demon would dare leave the confines of the pit.

Then a red-hot finger touched me from behind, searing and blistering me, and glancing back over my shoulder I saw that a whole company of fiends were pursuing me, and that it had been the foremost one whose fiery claws had just grazed me.

Burning with the pain of hell I dashed madly onward, followed closely by those fiery imps of the underworld. They pressed me close, chasing me here and there through the ether, and I feared each moment would be my last.

Then a desperate hope assailed me. If I could re-unite soul and body, perhaps I would be safe. These devils had power over the soul, but perhaps this power did not extend to a living, flesh-and-blood body.

Making a fresh spurt, I commenced my journey back toward my body. The fiends evidently guessed my intentions, for with louder, more threatening cries, they endeavored to overtake me.

I was now becoming exceedingly wearied by my exertions (for even an astral body can become fatigued, especially one cumbered with the weight of a heart and brain as mine was) and was almost in despair.

I had just come to the conclusion that I was doomed, when all at once I caught sight of my body, lying cold and stiff on my bed. Around it were gathered friends and relatives.

But the fiends were rapidly cutting down the distance between myself and them. Again I felt a blazing finger touch me, and again I leapt forward in pained agony.

Realizing that it was now or never, I put forth every iota of power I possessed, and dashing through the walls, I flung myself against my lifeless form. I felt the cold flesh yield before the impact and let in the soul. And with a last, wild yell, the baffled fiends turned tail and fled.

A CATALEPTIC fit—that was what the doctors called it. I didn't contradict them, for I knew that to have done so would have been useless. Indeed, a very close friend, to whom I related my story, looked at me pityingly and warned me not to tell it to anyone else, or I would surely be placed in a madhouse.

But for weeks I was cursed with awful nightmares of hideous dreams incessantly. Now they come less frequently, but still at rare intervals I am afflicted. Every night I go to sleep with the fear of hell fastened in my mind, and expect that ere morning I shall see the Master of Hell and his frightful dog. And I shall hear that unearthly, devilish laughter, and the grinding noise of Cerberus' molars crunching, crunching, crunching!

WINGS OF POWER

A THREE-PART NOVEL

by Lady Anne Bonny

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

PROFESSOR KURT MAQUARRI, the hunchback son of the great scientist Maquarri, has discovered a new element, called zodium, which gives him power over the human will. His stepdaughter, Joan Suffern, wears a ring which, unknown to her, contains some of this element. The hunchback has demonstrated his hypnotic control over Joan by sending out electronic force through his wishing machine, and she is thereby subject to his will so long as she wears the zodium ring. He plans to send her, hypnotized by the zodium, to kill Dr. Philip Olivier, who is on the threshold of the same discoveries that Maquarri has made. Dr. Olivier, a famous psychanalyst, is Maquarri's nephew, and has inherited from his grandfather, the elder Maquarri, the papers containing that great man's scientific secrets. Maquarri plans to have Joan steal the papers after she has killed Olivier, and then withdraw with him to her native island of Montserrat, where Maquarri intends to murder Lord Hubert Charing, Joan's uncle, and obtain the Charing fortune.

5

IN THE Leeward Islands they build their houses with the dread hurricane in mind. The old manor house of the Charings, which the first lord had built when he went out to be governor of the island of Montserrat more than two hundred years before, was no exception. On the edge of the cliffs overlooking the sea it stood, some nine miles out of the town of Plymouth. The side facing toward the land reared three stories of gray stone, whose windows looked out on a formal garden, but the steep hurricane roof of red slate sloped sheerly down on the side of the house toward the sea. Its diagonal line cut almost in half the dignified square bulk of the house, stretching from the top of the third story almost down to the ground, with only a low entrance at the rear to lead to the hurricane cellar underneath the building. The fiercest and most dreaded of hurricanes could not have lifted that steep roof from the building it sheltered; and in the long room at the rear of the old house, stretching across its width, its windows cut in the slope of the hurricane roof, the first Lord Charing had established himself. The view of the sea and the harbor was superb, and the succeeding masters had never cared to use any other room in the spacious old house.

Lord Hubert Charing, who had inherited the estate six years before, had spent many years wandering in strange corners of the earth, and when he established himself at the old sugar estate on the island, he was already famous as an entomologist.

with the most unusual collection of tropical butterflies and beetles in the world. He had found the thirty-foot room strangely to his liking, and there he had ranged his collection of insects. The coffin-shaped cases lined the walls of the room, but there were other cases piled high in the hurricane cellar that the room could not accommodate.

Lord Hubert, a man in the middle fifties, sat now at his desk in this room with the young English architect whom he had summoned to the islands to consult. He was about to build an entomological museum on the island of Montserrat, a museum that would cost almost a million dollars, but that would ensure his lasting fame, and he and the young architect were at work on the plans.

A knock came at the door, and Lord Hubert, loath to be disturbed in the discussion of the one subject he cared about, frowned angrily as he rose to open it. Pedro, his overlooker on the estate, stood in the doorway, his five-year-old son in his arms, and in back of him crowded the plantation doctor in his white linens.

"Pedro's youngster has been bitten by a tarantula, Lord Hubert."

Dr. Kilbourne pushed the overlooker forward into the room. He laid the boy on a couch and turned.

"As you know, the nervous system of a child his age has little power to resist the effects of the bite unless the proper antidotes are given immediately, but it will take two days to get over to St. John's for the fresh drugs. I have come to you because you told me that in your collection you possess two of the wasps known as *Pepsis Formosa*."

Dr. Kilbourne turned to Pedro, who bent over his boy.

"This *Pepsis Formosa* is commonly called the tarantula killer in Mexico, Pedro," he explained kindly. "If freshly applied to a sting, it stops the painful twitching immediately."

The doctor turned eagerly back to Lord Hubert.

"I am sure, your lordship," he began, "that you will let us have one of your *Pepsis Formosa* wasps to stop the lad's pain and twitching—"

"Certainly not!" answered the entomologist, staring coldly. "Do you not know that I am about to build a million dollar museum for my collection, and these specimens you want are exceptionally rare! In a long lifetime of collecting, I have only succeeded in obtaining three!"

"But the child is in pain! He will suffer tortures while he is waiting for us to send over to St. John's for a fresh supply of the necessary drugs!"

Lord Hubert shrugged.

"If it were a matter of life and death, I might—I might, I say—oblige you. But since it is only twenty-four hours of pain, well, the brat will have to stand it."

The doctor did not hide his anger, but Lord Hubert smiled sardonically.

"It took two months of hardship and danger in the Mexican desert for me to find the *Pepsis Formosa* for my collection."

Mindful of his position on the estate, Pedro said nothing, but he turned a look of hatred on his master. Lord Hubert merely smiled. He enjoyed thwarting people, and it was absurd, unheard of, that they should demand the rarest specimens he possessed.

"One would have thought from that doctor's air that I was merely a common, dispensing chemist!" he said to the young architect, who gathered his papers together for his departure.

LEFT alone, Lord Hubert cautiously bolted the door and made his way to a panel in the rear wall. His fingers found the cunningly concealed spot in the beading that ran around the panel, and as he pressed it, the door slipped noiselessly back,

disclosing a spiral staircase that ran to the top of the house. Slipping the panel back into place, Lord Hubert padded up the dark, dusty stairs. He stooped as he climbed the low and narrow staircase, but the tiny cupboard of a room into which he emerged at the top of the steps was just high enough so that his head grazed the ceiling.

This room was dusty and bare, its walls were of brick, and one round porthole high up on the wall gave a view of the harbor and the sea. An old telescope, dating from the time two hundred years before when the first Lord Charing had had this room built, stood in the center of the room. As Lord Hubert bent whimsically to look through the telescope and scan the stretch of sea, his imagination pictured his old ancestor in the same position. Only the lens of the telescope then had yielded more exciting scenes.

Through this glass, the first Lord Charing to come to the island of Montserrat had been accustomed to look for the return of Edward Teach, the pirate popularly known as Blackbeard, and when the pirate's ship hung its signals, Lord Charing had met him at the mouth of a cave connecting with an underground passage to the house.

As governor of the island of Montserrat, Lord Cecil had waged a ceaseless warfare against the pirates of the West Indies, but the story ran that there had been private dealings with Captain Edward Teach, and that the latter had entrusted to the governor a large share of his precious booty. The people in the islands had been full of the story at one time; they claimed that a chest containing fabulous wealth in gold and jewels was secreted somewhere in the old manor house, and that it explained the unbroken luck of the Charings.

When the pestilence swept the island, when hurricanes came and sugar crops were lost and whole fortunes swept away, the luck of the Charings remained unbroken, until it had become an island byword. Some said that old Lord Cecil, Lord Hubert's grandfather, had a magic chest of gold, a bottomless chest, somewhere, from which he drew unlimited sums; others that it was nothing but the fabulous treasure of Blackbeard, which he meant that the family should hold intact.

But when Lord Hubert, the present owner, in his superb egotism, had the island newspaper publish an account of his projected million dollar entomological museum, when he imported an architect from England to begin work on the plans, people winked at each other and said, "Blackbeard's booty will build that museum."

Lord Hubert merely smiled when reports of the rumors came to him. They little suspected, those fools, how true their guesses were, else they had before this made some attempt to steal the treasure. Leaving the telescope, he removed several loose bricks in the wall, and disclosed a steel safe behind them. Out of this safe he took a folded piece of parchment containing a strange cipher, and rapidly went over the familiar hieroglyphics of that cipher in his mind. Jotting down a note, he safely stowed the parchment away in the safe and replaced the bricks.

With the same noiseless tread of habit, he made his way down the dim staircase. One turning and he came to the door of his study on the second floor; another turning and the staircase was almost pitch dark, for it led down in back of the living rooms of the manor house, and the windowless steep slope of the hurricane roof shut it off on the other side; another turning, and Lord Hubert's groping fingers felt the rough stone of the wall that shut in the hurricane cellar underneath the foundations of the house. The beam of his searchlight

lit up the underground passage running alongside the cellar, and then, in complete darkness again, Lord Hubert groped his way along.

The darkness gradually merged into a dim twilight as he approached the mouth of the cave. The sea dashed its waves against the rocky cliffs surrounding the opening, and in the narrow slit of light Lord Hubert studied his paper once more. Then, counting the number of paces from the door of the cave, he came to the fourth block of stone. His searchlight revealed no trace of lock or opening, but as he pressed his chisel hard between the fourth block of stone and the next, there came a sharp click from the crack between the stones, and the one on his left swung back, revealing a stone chamber, a mausoleum, containing piled up chests of gold and silver and jewels.

"The bottomless chest of the Charings," muttered Lord Hubert. "Now that I am the last of the line, it shall go for a museum to my memory!"

And calculatingly, with none of the miser's gloating but all of the monomaniac's cunning, the man sat figuring how he should dispose of his inheritance to secure his own lasting fame.

IN HIS laboratory, Professor Kurt Maquarri studied the letter which lay before him.

"You see," he cried, turning to Felix, "we have no time to lose. Lord Hubert writes that the plans for his million dollar museum are already drawn. He invites me to contribute my entomological specimens to the museum after my death, and as a reward that wing of the building will be named after me."

Felix was speculative.

"The whole Charing plantation itself would not bring a million. It is plain that he means to use the family treasure for the purpose."

"Not yet, my friend!" cried the hunchback. "The girl has been going to Dr. Olivier for more than a month, and it will soon be time to strike. With the secrets in our grasp, we shall be in a position to sail immediately for the West Indies and the little matter of the treasure."

Maquarri reached forward and drew out of the secret compartment of his desk the ring that Joan always wore.

"I made her give it to me for one night—some trifling repair in the band—but here in the beetle's body I shall inject the zodium poison."

Felix leaned forward with interest. This master of his had always some fresh surprize.

"The poison ring of the Borgias!" he cried.

"The sixteenth century Italians had some skill in poison rings," smiled the hunchback, "but there was always danger of detection from the poison."

Maquarri looked into the mystified face of his accomplice.

"Zodium, my friend, like radium, is a radioactive element. A tiny particle, injected properly, electrocutes and causes almost instant death, but, like radium, it consumes itself and breaks up into other elements, so that the poison cannot be detected, and death is declared to have been from heart disease."

Felix's eyes glittered. His cunning brain had seized on an idea.

"And Mme. Maquarri, the young lady's mother, it was from heart disease that she died several months ago, was it not?"

Maquarri's jaws snapped together.

"Attested to by the certificate of the department of health, my friend, which the death of the beautiful West Indian was not! It is a good thing, eh, that I am a lean man who does not sleep much of nights, as I mentioned before, else I would have known noth-

ing of that underground passage to the cliffs and the sea."

Felix blanched.

"Maestro misunderstands," he muttered. "It was but a natural train of conclusions. I am enthralled at the glimpse of unlimited power which your discovery opens, that is all. Suggestion, hypnotism, call it what you will, for your own ends—a poison not to be detected for those who stand in your way—and beyond that—the wealth of the Indies—the power of a Cæsar!"

"The wings of power!" cried Maquarri, and crossing to a cage on the floor at the other end of the laboratory, he brought back a squirming white rat. "See, I must have one last trial before I strike."

He held on to the rat, and slipping the zodium ring over his little finger, where it refused to pass the first knuckle, he pressed against the line chased down the center of the beetle's body. A tiny needle shot out from the insect's head, and plunging this into the neck of the rat, Maquarri took the ring from his finger and examined it.

"Yes, it works," he cried. "The zodium poison has flowed out through the tiny needle."

The white rat on the table squirmed for the fraction of a second, then lay rigid.

Felix looked fearfully at his master.

"She goes to him tomorrow, then?"

"Tomorrow at 5—the usual time. Our ship sails for the West Indies at dawn on the day after, but she knows nothing of that. It is to be a surprize for her—for her health. For once the woman Susan agrees with my plans. You will drive directly here from Dr. Olivier's house, and we all go to the pier that night."

As Felix let himself out of the laboratory, he shivered. The man was deadly, fiendish. What guarantee had he that the poison ring would not be used against himself? The professor would be safe from detection, certainly. What surety that part of the treasure and the possession of Joan would fall to his lot? Well. he would be on his guard against him.

6

DR. OLIVIER looked up from his thick book as Christopher C. Quinn entered.

"I've been reading good old William James again, Chris, and I'm half determined to try out some of his theories of hypnotism on that girl."

"Oh, Miss X-Y, eh? How is she getting along? If only you were absolutely sure of the effects of your Zeta-ray, we could solve the mystery of her identity and finish the equation—Miss X-Y-Z."

Olivier's strained look warned his friend, and Quinn changed his tone.

"Shall you try the Zeta-ray on her?"

"Not yet. The risk is too great. I shall continue to use my ordinary psychanalytical methods — perhaps try what some harmless hypnotism will do, and wait for time to finish the work."

He frowned.

"You know, Chris, it's not possible that she should be already hypnotized. They never, in all the history of hypnotism, display her tendencies, and yet—this passing into a secondary level of consciousness seems to point to that conclusion. I tell you, I am baffled."

"If only you could find out more about her!"

"Oh, I daren't force it. Her trust must come gradually."

Quinn glanced at the younger man.

"I say, Phil, you aren't falling in love with her, are you? She's very beautiful, and beauty in distress, you know—eh, my boy?"

"What nonsense! She's a patient, and we psychanalysts have to school ourselves to have no emotions—except

the impersonal ones of pity and humanity."

Olivier looked grave.

"Besides, it wouldn't be fair—she's not herself. It would be taking advantage of her to make love to her."

The knuckles on Olivier's hands, so strangely marked with the chemicals, showed white, and Quinn stared at him for a moment, but the doctor was lost in his own thoughts and his friend said nothing.

AT a quarter before 5 that same afternoon, Professor Maquarri sat crouched in concentration over his wishing machine, his whole being projected in the immense undertaking that day was to decide.

Joan Suffern, closeted with Dr. Olivier, looked restlessly about.

"Why do I have these compulsions?" she asked fretfully, brushing back the hair from her forehead.

Dr. Olivier's gentle smile soothed her.

"Tell them to me and they will cease to be compulsions."

"Well, then, I want to see your laboratory—the work you are engaged upon—the wonderful scientific work the magazine article I read dwelt upon."

Smiling whimsically, more to humor the girl than anything else, Olivier led her through his inner office to the laboratory and study beyond.

"There is not much to see."

"But your experiments! The notebooks where you write all your wonderful formulæ, the results of your research—show them to me!"

"My dear child, they would be but a meaningless jumble of symbols, but you are welcome to look at them, if you want."

As Dr. Olivier unlocked the cabinet safe that held his papers, Joan's mood suddenly shifted. She watched as he pulled out the precious sheaf of papers and showed them to her. Then suddenly she grasped his hands.

"Ah, it is only when I hold your hands in mine that I feel safe," she whispered.

Olivier grew pale and held himself rigidly, but Joan drooped against him, lifting her arms about his neck.

"Hold me close to you," she murmured, her head thrown back.

For a moment, the young doctor struggled with the desire to put his mouth against hers, but the expression in her eyes held him back. He turned his head away, not wishing actually to repulse her, and her white hand moved closer to his throat. The fingers felt for his pulse, and the man trembled, but still he kept his head turned away. She was not herself, and it would be dastardly to take advantage of the trustful affection she felt for him when she was in that secondary level of consciousness.

BACK in his laboratory, Professor Kurt Maquarri's whole being poured itself out into the machine that sent its bluish, phosphorescent waves against the dark. A scream came from Mariquita in her room above, but Maquarri scarcely heard it. Certainly he had no intention of heeding it. Another scream shattered the room, but still Maquarri crouched over his machine.

Then there came a staccato outburst of words, and Mariquita stumbled down the stairs. The sleeve of her bright kimono still smoldered from the fire she had smothered, and her face was twisted.

"Fiend! Fiend!" she shrieked at Maquarri, who still bent over his machine, impervious to her presence and her cries. "Fiend and brute, to let me burn to death and never stir!"

All the excitable mixture of French and Spanish blood in the beautiful quadroon blazed into fury at his indifference. She snatched an iron mixing rod from the table at her side, and

before Maquarri could stop her, the rod came down with a shattering noise on the machine.

The hunchback leapt at her, but it was too late. The switch that set the complicated inner mechanism of the wishing machine in motion was dead and broken. Muttering curses at the frightened Mariquita, who slunk away out of the laboratory, he set to work feverishly to repair her damage.

JOAN was still in Olivier's arms, her head thrown back waiting for the kiss she all but asked for, when she suddenly stared at him in dismay. His arms fell from about her waist of their own accord.

"What is it?" whimpered Joan. "Why was I there in your arms?"

"I must beg you to forgive me—to understand—" stammered the young doctor.

"I know! I know!" Joan interrupted. "Don't imagine that I reproach you, Dr. Olivier. I understand that I forced you to take me in your arms."

She looked dazed, and pushed back the heavy hair from her forehead with a characteristic gesture.

"Oh, how could I have done it? What must you think of me?"

Olivier held both her hands, staring at her.

"You have never been this way before in your visits to me," he cried excitedly.

"I have never felt as I do now. It is true—it is as if I see you for the first time, Dr. Olivier. I remember dimly those other visits, of course, and my strange thoughts, but now for the first time since we left Montserrat, I feel myself."

Then a change came over her, and she started to sob.

"Joan, Joan, you have never been yourself with me before," muttered the doctor, and he was at her side. "Ah, if you knew, if you knew," he murmured, drawing her gently into his arms, "if you knew how much I have wanted to comfort you—to cherish you! But I didn't dare before. You were not yourself. It would have been taking advantage of you."

His arms held her close to him, but gently. Then he dropped his head.

"I love you," he said softly.

Joan's arms were a tender garland about his throat. As submissively as any child she accepted this love which her subconscious being must have recognized during all those weeks when the fiendish wishing machine held her conscious mind in check.

"I am glad," she said simply. And then, "I love you."

Their lips met in a solemn kiss.

"Oh! I am happy—happy!" cried the girl. "It is like the old days in Montserrat to love you!"

"The old days will come back more and more, my darling. Together we will fight the dark mood that comes over you. Promise me—when you feel it coming, you will hold fast to the thought of your love for me. Promise me you will fight it back!"

"Yes! Yes! I feel as if I have come out into the sunlight now that we love each other! As if the darkness can never come back—"

In the middle of her sentence, Joan stiffened in his arms. The tragic mask covered her features. The dark eyes stared into his unseeingly.

"Joan! Joan! Joan, my darling! Fight it! Fight it now—the mood—don't let it get you again!"

Dr. Olivier held the girl close to him as he stammered his frenzied pleading, but it was of no use.

"I must go now," was all she would say, set in one of those strange transfixions of mood that had baffled him before.

Numbly he let her go, after their accustomed fashion. Then, in a moment, he started to his feet.

"By God! I'll follow her this time! I'll make her fight it with me! Fool that I was, to waste in lovemak-

ing the precious moments when she was herself! Selfish fool and idiot! I should have made her tell me about herself—her life—so I could help her fight the environment—whatever it is—that preys on her mind!"

He was on the steps, but the street was deserted. At the corner, a low, gray car turned, and the doctor groaned at his carelessness.

Christopher C. Quinn met Dr. Olivier just as he was turning to go into the house.

"What is it, Phil? You look as if you wanted to murder someone."

"It would be myself, then. I've just done a fool thing. The girl—you know, the one with the dissociated personality—has been with me. She had a sudden turn for the better—came to herself for the first time, as it were. And then, all of a sudden, the old mood came back. I let her go, like an idiot! Should have followed her this time, and forced her secrecy!"

"Hm! She comes in that long gray car that stands outside your door, doesn't she?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"I've noticed the car, and the fellow that drives it. A queer, foreign sort of chap. Meant to take the car's number—just to satisfy that insatiable Sherlock Holmes side of my character—but I didn't. Next time she comes, I'll have a casual look at the license, and then we can trace the car's owner, if need be."

PROFESSOR KURT MAQUARRI was still bent over his wishing machine as Felix let himself into the laboratory late that afternoon.

"Where is she? Where is my stepdaughter?"

Felix stared.

"Has something gone wrong? She seemd the same when she left the doctor's office."

"Wrong? God! That devil Mariquita came in here in a rage and smashed the wishing machine while Joan was with the doctor, that's all! Get at the machine, Felix, and stay there until I return. I must find out from the girl how much she has told him. Twenty precious minutes he had her when she was not under my control, and God help us if she has told him anything to put him on our track!"

Ten minutes later Maquarri returned to the laboratory and Felix. The hunchback rubbed his hands with pleasure, his eyes gleaming.

"Capital! Capital!" he gloated. "The fool doctor spent the precious twenty minutes making love to the girl. She told it against her will—as if she were fighting the wishing machine and didn't want to tell it—but it was too strong for her."

"Then we are still safe, eh?"

"Still safe, but we must lose no more time than necessary. You will have to race down to the shipping offices, Felix, and change our tickets on the *Amazonia* to the next ship sailing for the West Indies. Where is that shipping list?"

With feverish fingers Maquarri turned the pages of the newspaper and scanned the list.

"Good! The *S. S. Guadeloupe* sails on Tuesday next. Exchange our tickets for that boat, and report back to me. She shall go to Dr. Olivier, then, on Monday afternoon, late, and that night we board the ship for Montserrat!"

7

"THE young lady comes at 5 today, eh, Phil?"

"If she comes at all, it will probably be at the usual hour. It is strange that she should have stayed away four days after—after that last time—"

Christopher C. Quinn eyed his young friend keenly. He started to say something, but thought better of the impulse.

"The young lady to see you, sir."

Miss Thompson stood in the doorway to Dr. Olivier's office, and once more Quinn eyed his friend keenly, for the young doctor had jumped to his feet and his face was alight.

"Hm! Think I'll just run along and take a look at that chauffeur and his license number," said the lawyer, but Olivier was already out of the room.

As Dr. Olivier's professional eye searched Joan's face, the light left his own.

She has come, he thought, as she came before so many times, but she is not herself—she is not the girl I held in my arms. I wonder—I must go slowly, lest I frighten her now—but I wonder whether she remembers that she told me she loved me.

Gently he took Joan's hands and held them, closely watching her the while. But the girl was the same beautiful automaton of former visits, of all former visits save the last. She sat looking at the ring on her finger, that strange ring that against his rational self always gave Dr. Olivier a creepy feeling. To his gentle questions she gave only the most perfunctory of replies, and then, with one of those swift transitions of mood that he had learned to expect, she was on her feet.

"Ah, I am restless—restless!" she cried. "Why will you not show me your laboratory where you work? Where you expect to find the means by which you can cure me?"

Olivier was at her side.

"Joan, Joan, try to remember what happened in that laboratory last Thursday when you were here!"

Joan looked at him, her expression half sullen, half dazed.

"Try to remember, Joan! You promised me then to fight this mood if it returned!"

"I remember nothing. I asked you to show me your work—your notebooks—and you did not."

"Yes, yes, I was willing to. But something happened to us both just as I was about to open them under your eyes. Don't you—can't you remember what that was?"

Joan shook her head.

"Come, I will show them to you again. You shall see them all today. Who knows?—perhaps the same scene—the same incidents—will bring it all back to you!"

But Dr. Olivier was disappointed. Joan was still the same beautiful automaton as he unlocked his safe and drew out the precious notebooks. What in the world, he thought, does she want to see these things for? These notebooks that must be completely unintelligible to her? And yet—perhaps it is a good sign. She is groping for something that will save her, and feels that the actual sight of my work will be more convincing than my own poor presence.

His mind filled with scientific and professional conjectures of the sort, Dr. Olivier watched Joan carefully as he explained that in that precious little sheaf of notebooks—in those yellowed papers—lay his hope of accomplishing a revolution in physical science.

He was almost deceived as she turned to him, with another transition of mood, and threw her arms about his neck, straining him to her. But a look at the white, staring face killed his hopes. She was not the Joan he had told of his love; not the girl who had returned his caresses and confessed to a similar love.

With a little shiver, Joan strained Olivier against her breast. Her hand was on his neck, slowly caressing it until her fingers felt the pulse of the vein above his collar. Then, with a darting, snakelike movement Joan pressed hard against the spot with the tip of the beetle's body that formed the jewel of the wishing ring.

Olivier's grip on Joan loosened and his eyes glazed. He crumpled up into

a heap beside the desk and lay sprawled. The girl snatched the notebooks and the yellowed sheaf of papers. Softly, swiftly, impelled by the force outside herself, she made her way out of the laboratory.

Through the inner office she sped, and out through the waiting room which Miss Thompson had left lighted when she closed the place for the day. She snatched from a chair her cape, concealing the papers underneath, and let herself out of the familiar door.

Felix, across the way, started the engine of his car as Joan ran down the steps. The car moved forward as Joan sank against the cushions, still in the daze that had dominated her during the past hour.

8

LATE that night Christopher C. Quinn made his brisk way down the street that led past the house of Dr. Olivier. He stopped in surprize as he noted that the wing containing the laboratory was still lighted.

"Good! He is working still on the experiment," thought Quinn, and he whistled to attract the doctor's attention.

A second and third whistle brought no response, and Christopher C. Quinn looked about him. Fine gravel protected the roots of a tree that stood in front of the house, where a piece of the sidewalk had been cut away, and taking up a handful, Quinn sent it pattering against the laboratory windows.

What the deuce! he thought. Surely the fellow must have heard him, and with a sudden foreboding, Quinn mounted the steps of the doctor's house and rang the bell. He had to ring four times before old Mme. Franchard, the housekeeper, appeared.

Quinn pushed past her, and made his way through the waiting room and office. As he burst open the laboratory door, the Irishman groaned. Dr. Philip Olivier lay stretched out on the floor beside his laboratory table.

Christopher C. Quinn bent over his friend and felt his pulse frenziedly. The white face was set and rigid, the lips drawn and the eyes glazed. Surely life had fled from the body to have left such a mask! Then the Irishman started. Under his fingers there was the faintest flicker of pulse in the doctor's wrist!

"Quick, Mme. Franchard!" he ordered. "Try to get Dr. Graetz, of the Graetz Radium Institute, on the telephone! He must have poisoned himself in an experiment, and Dr. Graetz would be the best person, if anyone would."

Olivier stirred, opening his eyes. He recognized Quinn and his eyes tried to convey a message. His tongue mumbled thickly, but Quinn, bending close, could not make out the words. Then the Irishman's keen eye noted the tiny prick of a needle on his friend's throat. He pointed to it, and Olivier nodded.

"It's zodium poison," mumbled the doctor, and this time Quinn understood. He shrank back in horror. Olivier tried to tell him what to do, but his thick tongue refused the task. He shook his head in despair.

Quinn fumbled with a case of instruments and brought over a hypodermic syringe. Olivier nodded as he saw it in his friend's hands. Then, by a superhuman effort, he dragged himself to a kneeling position, clinging to Quinn, and dragged him across the room, pointing to a bottle high up on the shelf.

It was a thin, crystal-like phial, and as Quinn reached for it excitedly with one hand, with Olivier clinging to the other, it almost slipped from his grasp. The doctor shrank back fearfully, but his friend managed to catch it against his body with his crooked elbow, disengaging his other hand to grasp it.

Somehow Olivier's mumbling tongue conveyed to Quinn that he must give him an injection from this bottle. The Irishman poured a small quantity into a glass container from the laboratory table and looked at it fearfully.

"Are you sure this is the chemical?" he asked, shoving the dish under Olivier's nose.

The latter nodded, and his drawn expression of pain decided Quinn. He would chance it. And dipping the needle into the strange, mercurial substance, he took up a small amount and injected it into the wrist which Olivier thrust forward.

Quinn watched tensely as Olivier leaned back against his arm, his eyes closed in a sort of lethargy. Then, in a few seconds, the color seemed to come gradually back to his bluish skin. His lips lost their drawn expression, and his eyes, when he opened them, were no longer glazed.

A torrent of questions rushed from the Irishman, but Olivier shook his head. He stuck out his tongue, as if trying to limber its paralyzed muscles.

At this moment, Dr. Graetz came into the room. He bent over Olivier to examine his heart, and his face took on a serious expression. Olivier tried to explain the situation to his colleague.

"Did for myself in an experiment," he mumbled. "It's zodium poison—"

But the effort had been too much, and Olivier had fainted.

Dr. Graetz was at the telephone, giving his concise orders that a member of his staff hurry to Olivier's house with pulmotor and oxygen tanks. As he talked, he kept a watchful eye on the man stretched out on the floor, and the expression on his face was slightly baffled. As Quinn pointed out to him the tiny needle prick on his friend's throat, and showed him the phial from which, at the doctor's bidding, he had given him an injection, Graetz's anxiety deepened.

"Hm! I know," he muttered. "Olivier has told me his theories concerning this hypothetical element. I have been glad to help him all I could out of my own knowledge of radium and its properties."

"Will he—will he die?" Quinn asked, his eyes on Olivier's drawn face.

"There's one chance in a thousand that we can pull him out of this, but only one chance."

Dr. Graetz looked in despair at his younger colleague.

"What a waste, though, if he should die! He was years ahead of all of us at the institute, and we knew it."

Once more Dr. Graetz bent over the unconscious man on the floor.

"I dare not move him until my assistant comes with the pulmotor," he said.

In a few minutes the door opened and his assistant entered, followed by a man bearing the pulmotor and another with a tank of oxygen.

"Now, sir," said Dr. Graetz, turning to Quinn, "if you will leave us alone for a few hours, we will do what we can to save our young friend."

Quinn waited outside in the doctor's office for what seemed to him an interminable period, but at last the door to the laboratory opened, and Graetz beckoned to him.

"He is breathing faintly now," he whispered, "and we will want your help to move him to a comfortable bed."

All through the night Quinn sat upstairs in the hall, outside Olivier's bedroom, his keen mind busy with the problem. Inside that room the two doctors battled to save the third from the encroaching menace of death, but Quinn was no nearer a solution. What was the mystery of that needle prick on his friend's throat? Who had

dealt the treacherous injection, and why? The gray dawn spread over the sky, but still Quinn pondered.

ON THE same morning, the steamship *Guadeloupe* was ready to sail with the tides, and most of her passengers were already on board, but Professor Kurt Maquarri anxiously walked up and down the dock as the sky grew steadily lighter.

"It is absurd, unheard of," he remonstrated. "I have a pass here permitting me to carry my new radio outfit, my own model for an invention, to the West Indies. Why should there be any question?"

"Passes are not supposed to be issued to private persons, sir."

The young officer who spoke looked up as another officer came back with the ship's captain. The latter examined the wishing machine, looked closely at Professor Maquarri, bent once more over the machine and finally shook his head with decision.

A sudden thought came to the professor. He pulled a letter from his wallet, and handed it to the captain.

"Lord Hubert Charing, you will see, who is my late wife's brother, specifically mentions that he will be glad to examine the new radio set which I intend bringing to Montserrat."

The attitude of the captain changed instantly. He glanced at the letter, and then extended a hand in apology to the professor. With a curt order, he turned to a deckhand, and the wishing machine was carried on board the *Guadeloupe*. The Charings were a power in the island, and large stockholders in this very steamship line.

AS THE *Guadeloupe* slipped slowly out of her dock and made her way down the river, the life of Dr. Olivier still hung in the balance.

Barred from the room, Christopher C. Quinn could scarcely contain his impatience until it was late enough for the world to be about its activities. The leaden hours of waiting for the crisis to pass might at least be spent in tracing down that license number, but it was still too early.

The girl had been the last person with Olivier. He had been expected to go out later to his club for dinner, so Mme. Franchard had not discovered that anything was amiss.

The girl! That strange, beautiful creature of mystery, Miss X-Y, as he had called her to tease Olivier. Miss X-Y, and she had used Olivier's own Zeta-ray to try to murder him.

But why? The thoughts jostled each other in his head. Why should she want to kill him? How had she managed to put her hands on Olivier's carefully guarded store of zodium, that store of which he was as yet so uncertain that he had refrained from publishing his discovery to the world?

All this was absurd, though. He knew nothing about the girl except the license number of the car she came in, and it was only chance that had made him get that. Well, it should be the first clue he would hunt to earth, and with that knowledge in his hand he would force Olivier to tell him what he knew.

Why should his friend have been so anxious to shield the girl? Could he have fallen in love with her? Quinn fumed. Those austere men of genius were just the ones to lose their heads over a pretty face when the time was ripe!

Quinn spent the morning tracking down the license number of the low, gray car, but he had finally to admit that his results were meager. It belonged, he learned, to one Felix d'Acosta, and the garage owner in the east sixties could tell little of him.

"Comes here alone mostly, sir," he answered to one of Quinn's questions. "Once, though, now I think of it, there was a fellow with a beard sat next him. A cripple he was, I

think. No, a hunchback. They spoke in some language I couldn't understand. Might have been Eyetalian, or Spanish, maybe. They all sound the same to me."

"This man, this Felix d'Acosta, he was the owner, you say?"

"Well, sir, that's what he claimed. License taken out in his name. Use of the car at all hours. Acted like the owner all right, except that one time when they stopped for repairs and the cripple—no, the hunchback, I mean—was with him. Seemed to take orders from the little fellow with the beard, though of course I couldn't understand what they were saying."

"Where is the car now? Out with its owner?"

"No, sir. He paid his bill yesterday morning. Said he was going away on a short trip—didn't say where—and might not be back for a month or two."

Quinn congratulated himself on having taken that license number. His clues might be leading into a blind alley, as it now appeared, but he was too good a lawyer, too keen an amateur detective, to scorn the slightest trace of a clue. One never could tell where it might lead.

"Here's ten dollars for you, my man, and remember to keep your mouth shut about this conversation between us. I'm after that fellow, d'Acosta, and I don't want him to know it. There'll be a cool hundred in it for you if you'll say nothing, and just let me know if he should return."

The garage owner read the card in his hand and gasped.

"Not Christopher Columbus Quinn, the big lawyer?"

Quinn nodded.

"I don't know how big I am, but if I'm not mistaken, I am on the trail of something big, right now."

He looked keenly at the garage owner.

"And you can help, if you want. Remember, I am relying on you, and I shall learn sooner or later whether you decide to stick to the forces of law or of lawlessness."

CHRISTOPHER C. QUINN'S elation dropped, however, as he made his way back to Dr. Olivier's house, where Dr. Graetz and another physician were watching the patient.

But Dr. Graetz's face temporarily reassured him.

"His pulse is more nearly normal," the doctor whispered, softly closing the door of the sickroom, "and he seems to be resting for the moment, but it's too soon to tell whether we shall be able to pull him through."

"Could I see him for two minutes?"

Dr. Graetz was doubtful, but Quinn seemed so certain that the tracing of an important clue depended on a word of information from his friend that the older physician finally consented to a five-minute interview.

Philip Olivier opened his eyes as Quinn sat down beside him.

"How did it happen, Phil?"

The impetuous question was out of the Irishman's mouth before he had time to remember his promise to Dr. Graetz.

Olivier's eyes darkened, and a drawn expression twisted his mouth.

"Did for myself in an experiment," he muttered.

"How did it happen, then, that there was the prick of a needle in your throat?"

Quinn's keen eyes held those of Olivier.

"Come, Phil, don't try to hide it from me. When I first came in, I spied that prick, and you admitted it!"

Olivier's lips were a tight line.

"Yes, then, I do admit the prick, Quinn, but I warn you, I know what I'm about. I don't want any of your Sherlock Holmes stunts in this. It's —it's a personal matter."

(Continued on Page 180)

THE SCARF OF THE BELOVED

By GREYE LA SPINA

Author of "The Tortoise-Shell Cat" and "The Remorse of Professor Panebianco"

THE night was dark and gloomy, but for him it was better so; the thick darkness, the approaching storm, all made detection less probable. Lowering clouds, scurrying across the sky, dimmed the sickly rays of the pale moon. The wind, soughing in the branches of the cypresses and among the ghostly tombstones, seemed to carry indignant and mournful whisperings from those graves that had escaped the desecration the others had experienced. Ever and anon, the faint, scared chirp of some homeward fluttering bird came softly to his ear.

The night was almost breathless with expectancy of the coming storm. The lurid flash of the lightning made the dense darkness almost palpable. The fitful warning of those vivid flashes urged haste upon him; he must complete his work before the storm broke in its concentrated fury.

His spade struck heavily against a leaden coffin. He stopped digging and whistled cautiously for his assistant. In a few minutes the coffin had been pried open, and the shroud pulled out, bringing rudely with it the cold clay that lay sleeping so heavily in death's long slumber. Presently the body fell with heavy thud upon the bed of the wagon that waited just without the cemetery gates. The second man covered it with sacking, climbed upon the wagon, and drove away. The first man began to fill in the rifled grave with earth.

His task completed, he paused for a moment as he contemplated the mound rising above that hollow mockery of a grave. A sudden premonition as of evil about to fall upon him oppressed his spirit. With uncontrollable impulse, he caught up his tools and fled from the spot.

The storm was approaching apace. The muttering of the thunder could be heard more distinctly as it grew slowly in volume and then died reluctantly and threateningly away among the surrounding hills. The moon looked down from among the scurrying clouds, her pale and baleful gleams lighting the solitary scene with ghostly light.

Among the treetops the vanguards of the tempest rustled and tossed the branches with a sound as of souls sighing in durance. The usual calm night-calls of insects were hushed before the approach of the storm; only the occasional guttural croak of a bullfrog disturbed the chill hush that had fallen upon nature. A bird's timid, half-affrighted twitter came from the bushes near at hand, and the man glanced casually in that direction before turning homeward.

As he glanced, he described in the moon's fitful light a soft, fluttering thing on the ground at his feet. He leaned down and picked it up. It was a woman's silken shawl, such a thing as his sweetheart wound about her delicate shoulders when the evening breezes blew chill. Whence had it come?

Even as he asked himself, he knew: it had fallen from the body of that dead whom he had disturbed in its

solemn sleep. An involuntary shudder gripped him. He would have thrown the thing away, but that its finding at daybreak would have led to the discovery of the violated grave, which might otherwise escape observation.

The wind blew chiller, and yet more chill. Autumn had set in with a will, and was sweeping down on the wings of the flying tempest. The boughs of the trees swept lower and lower; the rustling among them grew more audible, more pronounced. It was as if the spirits of the dead were revisiting the scene of their last resting place, crying out in horror and loathing upon the man who had ruthlessly broken in on the slumber of so many of their sad company.

Whispering and murmuring and muttering among the trees, and rushing around the tall tombstones that shone with weird whiteness from out the surrounding gloom, the wind flung itself upon the solitary figure of the man, who stood as if frozen to the spot, his gleaming eyes fixed with a stony stare on the frail, shimmering, cobwebby thing in his hands.

Paler than the dead who lay so still in their quiet rest in the churchyard; colder than the very touch of death itself; rigid as the body when the breath has gone forever; there he stood, the epitome of awful fear. With eyeballs starting from their sockets, open mouth, dilated nostrils, he seemed the very personification of incredulous horror.

The landscape swept and swirled around him. The wind sang in his ears as water sings in the ears of a drowning man. It tugged and pulled and beat at him as he stood immovable, clutched fast in the grasp of an awful fear, a horrible surmise.

In those outstretched hands lay the silken trifle, upon which his gaze was fixed with terrible intensity. The scarf was that of his promised wife. Only too well he knew it—that shimmering, lacy scarf he had so often seen about her shoulders. It was hers—hers—hers!

IT SEEMED centuries that he stood there, eons of agony through which he passed in a fleeting moment. The appalling uncertainty of the thing rushed over him overwhelmingly. The scarf was hers. How, then, came it about the body of the dead? Her father had never been a strong man; perhaps an attack of heart trouble—something sudden—. The bare idea that he had profaned that grave, the grave of *her* father, lacerated his heart with remorse.

He dared not admit to himself, in that moment of horrible dread and uncertainty, the doubts that began to assail him. His one idea was that he must see, and that immediately, the dead whom his promised wife had covered with the scarf which he now held nervelessly in cold, stiff fingers. Yet the unwelcome belief grew ever stronger that it was indeed the body of her father, which his sacrilegious hand had desecrated unknowingly. The body of that sacred dead must at all costs be rescued from the medical students; must be returned to its resting place.

Instinctively, while his mind had not yet consciously formulated the desire, the man's limbs bore him rapidly in the wake of the wagon, which had long since disappeared in the gloom. He walked rapidly ahead, hushing the thoughts that hammered and clamored at the portal of his brains for admittance.

The road was rough, and the way long, but he walked steadily forward, as if in a trance. That the storm had already begun to batter on the trees bordering the road, he did not even notice. The rain had not yet come, but the wind had sent reinforcements to aid the vanguard which, during the earlier part of the night, had been rustling and pushing about

among the trees. There was a continuous dull roar, as the thunder grew in volume and came nearer. The noise of the wagon wheels had died away, but the dark figure in the road toiled painfully onward.

NOW the lights from the medical annex, dim through the gloom and the mists of blurring boughs that swept backward and forward before the night wanderer, revealed themselves. The wagon stood without. He ran to it, panting. It was empty. He hurried to the dissecting room and pushed against the door.

No one answered his low call. He pressed his face against the window in a vain attempt to see within, but the curtain had been closely drawn. At last, replying to his impatient knocks, a hand lifted it ever so slightly and a face looked into his, blanching as it looked. For a moment the man outside forgot his errand in the chilling shudder that swept through him at sight of that face gloomed over with shrinking abhorrence.

There was a murmur of lowered voices. The door opened cautiously and two or three students whom he knew emerged and closed it behind them. Portrayed on every countenance was that same look of horror and repugnance and loathing that had so startled him in the face of that man who had looked at him from the window.

He pushed his way toward the door; they shrank before him as he advanced. He demanded entrance in a voice that he scarcely knew as his own, a voice that died away, failing him at the looks of dread and frozen horror on the faces confronting him. No one spoke. Each gazed at the others, avoiding his proximity as they might have avoided contact with a man stricken with pestilence. He thought he heard a whispered word—"Nemesis!"—but it came from as remote distance as might have come a dream voice.

Once more he made his request, but now it was in the manner of one who demands. A student pointed wordlessly, and he gathered from the gesture that the way was open to him. As he grasped the knob, the students with one accord melted away from that spot, unhallowed by its associations with robbery of the grave.

The man crossed the threshold and the wind pushed shut the door behind him with its invisible, malignant fingers. He moved across the room, still holding the silken scarf in his nerveless fingers. He paused before the table, whereon lay the dead whom he had that night dragged out of the peaceful grave.

With a quick gesture he tore away the sheet that concealed the cold and lifeless clay.

A tress of hair, rich, waving, auburn, trailed upon the floor.

One horrible, dissonant scream of bitter anguish shrilled from his lips, reverberated through the room, and wailed out on the chill night wind into the ears of the shuddering students dashing across the campus.

The body was that of his promised bride!

Author of "Dagon," "The Rats in the Walls," etc.

I REPEAT to you, gentlemen, that your inquisition is fruitless. Detain me here forever if you will; confine or execute me if you must have a victim to propitiate the illusion you call justice; but I can say no more than I have said already. Everything that I can remember, I have told with perfect candor. Nothing has been distorted or concealed, and if anything remains vague, it is only because of the dark cloud which has come over my mind—that cloud and the nebulous nature of the horrors which brought it upon me.

Again I say, I do not know what has become of Harley Warren, though I think—almost hope—that he is in peaceful oblivion, if there be anywhere so blessed a thing. It is true that I have for five years been his closest friend, and a partial sharer of his terrible researches into the unknown. I will not deny, though my memory is uncertain and indistinct, that this witness of yours may have seen us together as he says, on the Gainsville pike, walking toward Big Cypress Swamp, at half past 11 on that awful night. That we bore electric lanterns, spades, and a curious coil of wire with attached instruments, I will even affirm; for these things all played a part in the single hideous scene which remains burned into my shaken recollection. But of what followed, and of the reason I was found alone and dazed on the edge of the swamp next morning, I must insist that I know nothing save what I have told you over and over again. You say to me that there is nothing in the swamp or near it which could form the setting of that frightful episode. I reply that I knew nothing beyond what I saw. Vision or nightmare it may have been—vision or nightmare I fervently hope it was—yet it is all that my mind retains of what took place in those shocking hours after we left the sight of men. And why Harley Warren did not return, he or his shade—or some nameless *thing* I cannot describe—alone can tell.

As I have said before, the weird studies of Harley Warren were well known to me, and to some extent shared by me. Of his vast collection of strange, rare books on forbidden subjects I have read all that are written in the languages of which I am master; but these are few as compared with those in languages I cannot understand. Most, I believe, are in Arabic; and the fiend-inspired book

which brought on the end—the book which he carried in his pocket out of the world—was written in characters whose like I never saw elsewhere. Warren would never tell me just what was in that book. As to the nature of our studies—must I say again that I no longer retain full comprehension? It seems to me rather merciful that I do not, for they were terrible studies, which I pursued more through reluctant fascination than through actual inclination. Warren always dominated me, and sometimes I feared him. I remember how I shuddered at his facial expression on the night before the awful happening, when he talked so incessantly of his theory, why certain corpses never decay, but rest firm and fat in their tombs for a thousand years. But I do not fear him now, for I suspect that he has known horrors beyond my ken. Now I fear *for* him.

Once more I say that I have no clear idea of our object on that night. Certainly, it had much to do with something in the book which Warren carried with him—that ancient book in undecipherable characters which had come to him from India a month before—but I swear I do not know what it was that we expected to find. Your witness says he saw us at half past 11 on the Gainsville pike, headed for Big Cypress Swamp. This is probably true, but I have no distinct memory of it. The picture seared into my soul is of one scene only, and the hour must have been long after midnight; for a waning crescent moon was high in the vaporous heavens.

THE place was an ancient cemetery; so ancient that I trembled at the manifold signs of immemorial years. It was in a deep, damp hollow, overgrown with rank grass, moss, and curious creeping weeds, and filled with a vague stench which my idle fancy associated absurdly with rotting stone. On every hand were the signs of neglect and decrepitude, and I seemed haunted by the notion that Warren and I were the first living creatures to invade a lethal silence of centuries. Over the valley's rim a wan, waning crescent moon peered through the noisome vapors that seemed to emanate from unheard-of catacombs, and by its feeble, wavering beams I could distinguish a repellent array of antique slabs, urns, cenotaphs, and mausolean façades; all crumbling, moss-grown, and moisture-stained, and partly concealed by the gross luxuriance of the unhealthy vegetation.

My first vivid impression of my own presence in this terrible necropolis concerns the act of pausing with Warren before a certain half-obliterated sepulcher, and of throwing down some burdens which we seemed to have been carrying. I now observed that I had with me an electric lantern and two spades, whilst my companion was supplied with a similar lantern and a portable telephone outfit. No word was uttered, for the spot and the task seemed known to us; and without delay we seized our spades and commenced to clear away the grass, weeds, and drifted earth from the flat, archaic mortuary. After uncovering the entire surface, which consisted of three immense granite slabs, we stepped back some distance to survey the charnel scene; and Warren appeared to make some mental calculations. Then he returned to the sepulcher, and using his spade as a lever, sought to pry up the slab lying nearest to a stony ruin which may have been a monument in its day. He did not succeed, and motioned to me to come to his assistance. Finally our combined strength loosened the stone, which we raised and tipped to one side.

The removal of the slab revealed a black aperture, from which rushed an effluence of miasmal gases so nauseous that we started back in horror. After

an interval, however, we approached the pit again, and found the exhalations less unbearable. Our lanterns disclosed the top of a flight of stone steps, dripping with some detestable ichor of the inner earth, and bordered by moist walls encrusted with niter. And now for the first time my memory records verbal discourse, Warren addressing me at length in his mellow tenor voice; a voice singularly unperturbed by our awesome surroundings.

"I'm sorry to have to ask you to stay on the surface," he said, "but it would be a crime to let anyone with your frail nerves go down there. You can't imagine, even from what you have read and from what I've told you, the things I shall have to see and do. It's fiendish work, Carter, and I doubt if any man without ironclad sensibilities could ever see it through and come up alive and sane. I don't wish to offend you, and Heaven knows I'd be glad enough to have you with me; but the responsibility is in a certain sense mine, and I couldn't drag a bundle of nerves like you down to probable death or madness. I tell you, you can't imagine what the thing is really like! But I promise to keep you informed over the telephone of every move—you see I've enough wire here to reach to the center of the earth and back!"

I can still hear, in memory, those coolly spoken words; and I can still remember my remonstrances. I seemed desperately anxious to accompany my friend into those sepulchral depths, yet he proved inflexibly obdurate. At one time he threatened to abandon the expedition if I remained insistent; a threat which proved effective, since he alone held the key to the *thing*. All this I can still remember, though I no longer know what manner of *thing* we sought. After he had obtained my reluctant acquiescence in his design, Warren picked up the reel of wire and adjusted the instruments. At his nod I took one of the latter and seated myself upon an aged, discolored gravestone close by the newly uncovered aperture. Then he shook my hand, shouldered the coil of wire, and disappeared within that indescribable ossuary.

For a minute I kept sight of the glow of his lantern, and heard the rustle of the wire as he laid it down after him; but the glow soon disappeared abruptly, as if a turn in the stone staircase had been encountered, and the sound died away almost as quickly. I was alone, yet bound to the unknown depths by those magic strands whose insulated surface lay green beneath the struggling beams of that waning crescent moon.

IN THE lone silence of that hoary and deserted city of the dead, my mind conceived the most ghastly fantasies and illusions; and the grotesque shrines and monoliths seemed to assume a hideous personality—a half-sentience. Amorphous shadows seemed to lurk in the darker recesses of the weed-choked hollow and to flit as in some blasphemous ceremonial procession past the portals of the moldering tombs in the hillside; shadows which could not have been cast by that pallid, peering crescent moon.

I constantly consulted my watch by the light of my electric lantern, and listened with feverish anxiety at the receiver of the telephone; but for more than a quarter of an hour heard nothing. Then a faint clicking came from the instrument, and I called down to my friend in a tense voice. Apprehensive as I was, I was nevertheless unprepared for the words which came up from that uncanny vault in accents more alarmed and quivering than any I had heard before from Harley Warren. He who had so calmly left me a little while previously, now called from below in a shaky whisper more portentous than the loudest shriek:

"God! If you could see what I am seeing!"

I could not answer. Speechless, I could only wait. Then came the frenzied tones again:

"Carter, it's terrible—monstrous—unbelievable!"

This time my voice did not fail me, and I poured into the transmitter a flood of excited questions. Terrified, I continued to repeat, "Warren, what is it? What is it?"

Once more came the voice of my friend, still hoarse with fear, and now apparently tinged with despair:

"I can't tell you, Carter! It's too utterly beyond thought—I dare not tell you—no man could know it and live—Great God! I never dreamed of *this!*"

Stillness again, save for my now incoherent torrent of shuddering inquiry. Then the voice of Warren in a pitch of wilder consternation:

"Carter! for the love of God, put back the slab and get out of this if you can! Quick!—leave everything else and make for the outside—it's your only chance! Do as I say, and don't ask me to explain!"

I heard, yet was able only to repeat my frantic questions. Around me were the tombs and the darkness and the shadows; below me, some peril beyond the radius of the human imagination. But my friend was in greater danger than I, and through my fear I felt a vague resentment that he should deem me capable of deserting him under such circumstances. More clicking, and after a pause a piteous cry from Warren:

"Beat it! For God's sake, put back the slab and beat it, Carter!"

Something in the boyish slang of my evidently stricken companion unleashed my faculties. I formed and shouted a resolution, "Warren, brace up! I'm coming down!" But at this offer the tone of my auditor changed to a scream of utter despair:

"Don't! You can't understand! It's too late—and my own fault. Put back the slab and run—there's nothing else you or anyone can do now!"

The tone changed again, this time acquiring a softer quality, as of hopeless resignation. Yet it remained tense through anxiety for me.

"Quick—before it's too late!"

I tried not to heed him; tried to break through the paralysis which held me, and to fulfil my vow to rush down to his aid. But his next whisper found me still held inert in the chains of stark horror.

"Carter—hurry! It's no use—you must go—better one than two—the slab—"

A pause, more clicking, then the faint voice of Warren:

"Nearly over now—don't make it harder—cover up those damned steps and run for your life—you're losing time—so long, Carter—won't see you again."

Here Warren's whisper swelled into a cry; a cry that gradually rose to a shriek fraught with all the horror of the ages—

"Curse these hellish things—legions—My God! Beat it! *Beat it!* BEAT IT!"

After that was silence. I know not how many interminable eons I sat stupefied; whispering, muttering, calling, screaming into that telephone. Over and over again through those eons I whispered and muttered, called, shouted, and screamed, "Warren! Warren! Answer me—are you there?"

And then there came to me the crowning horror of all—the unbelievable, unthinkable, almost unmentionable thing. I have said that eons seemed to elapse after Warren shrieked forth his last despairing

warning, and that only my own cries now broke the hideous silence. But after a while there was a further clicking in the receiver, and I strained my ears to listen. Again I called down, "Warren, are you there?" and in answer heard the *thing* which has brought this cloud over my mind. I do not try, gentlemen, to account for that *thing*—that voice—nor can I venture to describe it in detail, since the first words took away my consciousness and created a mental blank which reaches to the time of my awakening in the hospital. Shall I say that the voice was deep; hollow; gelatinous; remote; unearthly; inhuman; disembodied? What shall I say? It was the end of my experience, and is the end of my story. I heard it, and knew no more—heard it as I sat petrified in that unknown cemetery in the hollow, amidst the crumbling stones and the falling tombs, the rank vegetation and the miasmal vapors—heard it well up from the innermost depths of that damnable open sepulcher as I watched amorphous, necrophagous shadows dance beneath an accursed waning moon.

And this is what it said:

"You fool, Warren is DEAD!"

DEATH

By JAMES C. BARDIN

MOST men fear and dread death, especially if they allow themselves to contemplate it when they are in no apparent danger of experiencing it. The law's final punishment is death. The pangs of death have been held up before us by the supreme artists as the most frightful of human calamities.

But is death the terrible thing that human imagination pictures it? Is the moment of the separation of body and soul as dreadful as we suppose?

The evidence of observers, from remote antiquity until the present, indicates that we poor humans, when faced by the prospect of death, and when plunged into the terror that thought of personal extinction always brings along with it, confuse death itself with what may come after. We really fear, not the wrench that pulls the reluctant soul from the agonized body, but we fear the destiny that awaits us beyond the grave. And death itself is usually painless and unregarded by the dying.

Aristotle and Cicero affirm that death brought about by old age is without pain; and Plato tells us that death caused by syncope is accompanied by pleasant sensations. He goes farther and asserts that even violent death is not wholly lacking in pleasurable elements. The Greeks were more or less indifferent to death; but in some respects, popular superstitions gave rise among them to peculiar dread of certain forms of death. Drowning was peculiarly abhorrent to them, either because they believed that the souls of those who died in this way had to wander without rest for a hundred years; or because, conceiving the soul to be of a fiery nature, they believed that its greatest enemy was water, and that water would quench or at least seriously damage the subtle fiery essence of their being. Drowning is, however, regarded as one of the pleasantest forms of death, and men who have been dragged from the water unconscious and on the very threshold

of the other world affirm that once they lost their power to resist, and yielded to what seemed to them to be their inevitable fate, they suffered nothing.

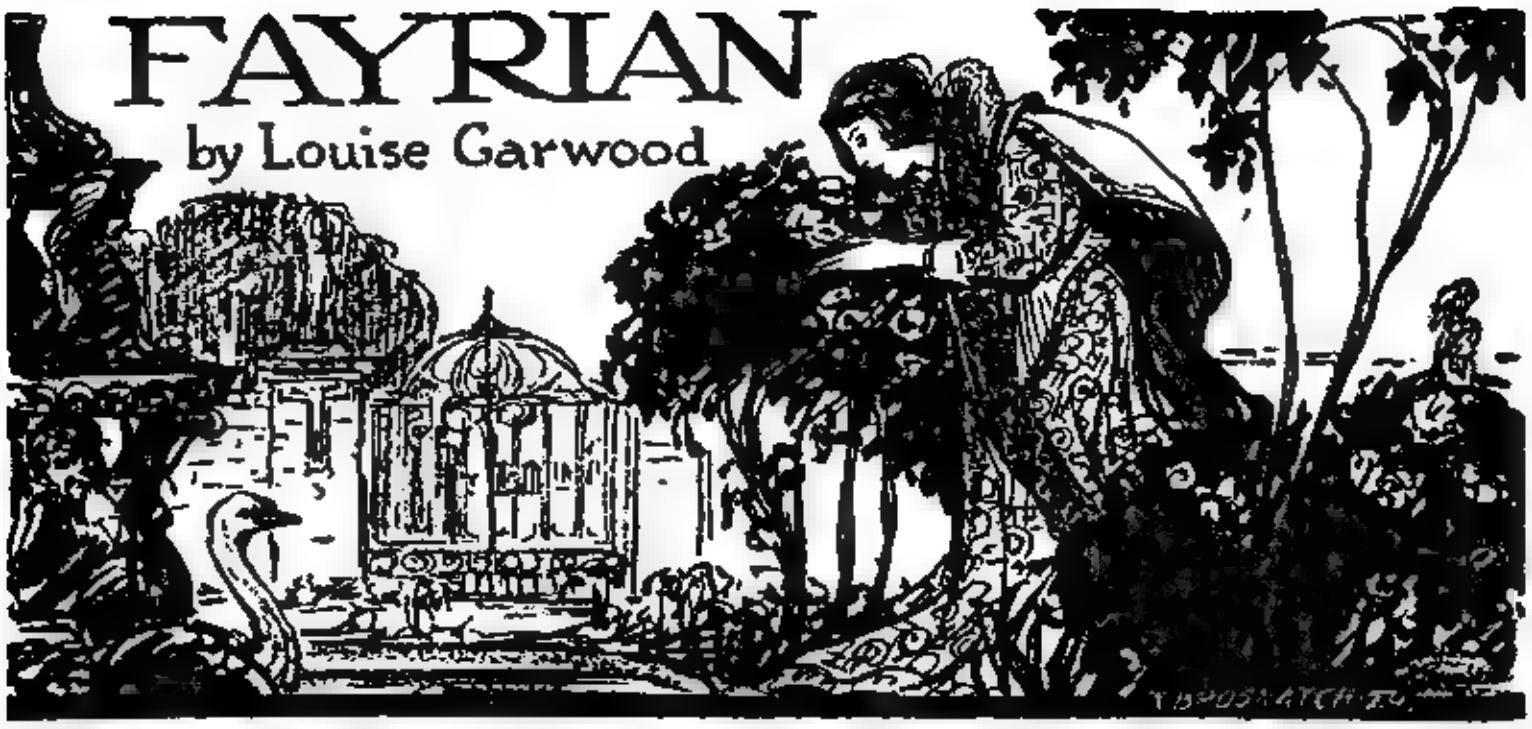
A quick death by violence, which horrifies us more than any other form (as is testified by the inclusion in all our prayer books of petitions to God to save us from violent death), is really the least terrible form, if we are to believe the testimony of many who have been miraculously snatched back to life after suffering some frightful accident. In such accidents, one feels very little pain, because the very thing that would cause agony abolishes all sensation almost instantly. Many men who have fallen from great heights, and have lain for a while as dead men, declared afterwards that they did not feel anything when they struck the earth. A noted hunter of wild beasts, in a recent article, recounts his experiences when attacked and nearly killed by a leopard: the excitement and the struggle were so intense that although one of his arms was practically chewed off and his body horribly lacerated, he felt nothing, but passed suddenly into an unconscious state.

In its desire to punish, or wreak vengeance on criminals, the law has constantly sought methods of execution which, by their frightful nature and the suffering caused to the victim, would discourage men from committing crimes. Such curious data to be found in the works of men of unquestioned sincerity make it doubtful whether the law has succeeded in finding ways of putting criminals to death in a painful manner. The great scientist Lord Bacon tells the story of a knight whose curiosity had been aroused concerning the amount of suffering endured by men being hanged; and he decided to try an experiment to learn whether this form of death were as terrible as it was thought to be. He climbed up on a table and placed around his neck a rope hung from the ceiling, and threw himself into the air with the intention of scrambling back on the table, which he had placed in such a position that he could easily do so, as soon as his agony became unendurable. But the good knight had not foreseen what was going to occur to him, and if one of his friends, who was there to witness his experiment, had not become alarmed by the long time that the knight swung in the noose, and cut him down, the good man would have been as successfully hanged as if the executioner had had charge of the affair! The knight afterwards explained that from the very instant that the noose tightened about his neck, he lost all power of feeling, and although conscious for a while, he did not remember anything about the table, nor did he realize his danger, and he felt no disagreeable sensations, not even suffocation.

This is what probably happens to all who are put to death, whether by hanging, by decapitation, by electricity, or what not; and also to all who suffer death by violence, except in a few cases. It seems impossible that there should be anything more than a sort of instantaneous agony, because almost at the instant of receiving the *coup de grace,* the victims lose consciousness.

FAYRIAN

by Louise Garwood



RAIN, gentle, relentless, soul-soaking. It seeped through the elms sadly, whimpered around gray stone cornices; and from a distance the wind brought tales of how it pattered upon the sea below the ragged cliffs. Only soft April rain, but Ermengarde grew cold, watching, and shut the window. Then she pulled close the somber velvet curtains, though they could not shut out the sound. That whimpering! As she went toward the broad hearth where a small fire burned, she drew her dark shawl tightly around her.

The room with its high, beamed ceiling, the carved table and the tapestries which a light draft ruffled eerily —how its familiar things stood out like so many impotent, disregarded selves: the white parchment-covered volume he had read, the candelabra that had lighted the reading, the slim, pointed dagger with the emerald-studded hilt, flung carelessly on the table, a lute with a broken string. They were eloquent of death. She sat down wearily in a tall chair before the fire and rested her elbows on the arms, her hands touching each other, the long white fingers pointed upward. She lifted one arched black eyebrow so that deep lines ran across her white forehead up to the roots of lusterless black hair.

Now she would go over it again, as if for the first time, go over it in the quaint, half-mad question and answer with which she tortured herself.

"Dead."

"*Dead?*"

"Yes."

"Who is dead?"

"Fayrian, whom you love—golden-haired Fayrian."

"Yes, yes, I remember!"

"Fayrian was killed."

"Who killed him?"

"You—you who loved him."

"I remember."

With an oblique glance of her heavy-lashed eyes she saw the long table. It had been set so: there had been Polevay; at the far end, herself; and here, Fayrian with the poison in his cup. She it was who had put the poison there, but they had hanged Polevay because he had once threatened to kill Fayrian. It did not matter that Polevay was hanged, for he was a bad man, already scarlet with other murders. She had not wanted to die, because hanging would mean that her white neck would be broken, her face turned purple. To die—it would hurt: and Fayrian would not

want that—not revenge, for he loved her. Rather he would have wished her to go out to death easily, with all her white, lusterless beauty untouched, without tears to dim her slanting, violet-pupiled eyes. A deep shudder ran over her. She had killed him, madly, jealously. And yet she had known that the woman with the corn-silk hair and candid smile could not have held him long—it was a fancy. For his love was built upon *her* as upon a foundation of stone; his soul was anchored to hers as a bright craft is anchored in a troubled water.

When in her anger the poison slipped into the cup so easily, she had not known how horrible it would be. She had not guessed that he would writhe and twist like a hound whose meat has been filled with fine-ground glass, nor that he would whimper, like a child. That was it: the whimpering of the rain at the cornices. It made her cold. It was not right that Fayrian, who was brave and songful, should die like a dog. He would not have been afraid of death, but he had wanted a glorious passing: a battle, a duel for his honor, a plunge from a mountain height. Strange, how men could endure blood and horror and yet cringe at a little pain, like children! He had whimpered. Why had she not thrust the emerald-hilted dagger into his heart? No, she could not have done that—his soft flesh—blood on her fingers—a red stain on his lizard-colored doublet—no! It had not been fair; but he was gentle and had loved her: surely he would not want revenge! And she had loved him—she had killed him for her love.

Song, little rushes of tender words, deep, serious lights sifting into his bright eyes—how empty of these things the house was! And yet there was a kind of breathlessness about the silence—the breathlessness that comes before an expected footfall, a longed-for voice. The stillness listened. The emptiness expected to be filled. Death! Soon, soon, please God, she might wake to feel a slim, strong hand over her shaking one, a voice: "Foolish, foolish. You are dreaming!" She shut her eyes and tried to imagine it; but no, she was not dreaming.

Then all of a sudden the mute expectancy of the somber room seemed filled. A heavy shower of rain crashed down outside: it was like calls, like footfalls, and through it the breeze wandered like a weird song. Scarcely knowing why, she ran to the window and pulled back the purple curtains, to look out. She opened it. A flurry of rain blew in and the drops were like wet fingers touching her face. Then, as suddenly as it had started, the downpour slackened again into a seeping drizzle. Tears falling sadly through the leaves, making them shine in the patch of light the window threw out in the darkness. Little trembling sobs of wind against the stones. He had wanted to die splendidly! Vaguely she had a sense of contact with what was outside. It swept over her all at once like the knowledge of a physical presence. That sadness of the rain was human—human pain. She leaned far through the window so that her hair, face and bosom were wet and cool. Then she heard him whimpering, whimpering.

"Concetta! Concetta!" she called and fell back from the window, in a shudder; and in a moment she was in the arms of the ponderous, wrinkled old woman who served her.

"Lady Ermengarde, dear—there, there!"

She was weeping. The curse of tearless days was lifted in sobs that broke the bitter dam of dry unreality and longing.

"The rain, Concetta! Oh—the rain!"

"There, there! I will shut the rain out. The dampness is spotting the curtains!"

"No, no!"

She lifted her face wildly from the old woman's shoulder.

"No, you will shut *him* out! I want the rain. Stay with me, Concetta; I am frightened."

"Yes—now my dear, dear lady, let me take you to your room, where you can lie in your bed and rest."

"No. I shall sleep here and you must sit beside me. I shall sit in the chair by the fire, for I am cold."

"Very well, and I will close the window for you."

"No, no! Leave it open, I say."

She caught the wrinkled arm in her long fingers. The old woman took her to her chair and muffled the dark shawl around her, then sat at a distance on a low bench; taking out some bit of hand-work she plied her fingers busily. Ermengarde kept her burning eyes upon the window, and little by little the rain seeped into her consciousness as it did through the elms outside. The feeling of it, the sound of it, permeated her, a film over her utter weariness; and beneath a certain trembling fear there was a warm sensation of nearness, the touch of loved hands. She closed her eyes.

"SO I was only dreaming?"

She started at the touch of a hand on hers and opened her eyes quickly. Only Concetta's hand, wrinkled and hard! Where was she? Oh, yes, she had slept by the fire all night; and now there were ashes before her and the room was crossed by a bright bar of sunshine. The old woman was offering her something to eat. Today she did not have that old heavy wakening, knowing that little by little a dreadful knowledge would creep back into her consciousness. She woke in the full realization of it. Fayrian was dead. She had killed him. Then there had been rain, sweet and intimate, that refreshed her heart, and now sunshine that stretched like a warm hand into the room. The lute, the dagger, the book, those eloquent selves were no longer pitiful. They looked somehow as if they had been lately touched by him. The picture of his father that hung across from the tapestries, usually so solemn a face, had been changed by the sun, too: it looked years younger, like Fayrian himself, and a shadow falling near the lips made it look as if he were smiling sadly. Ermengarde was sad. It was good to be sad after the horrid weeks of stillness—good to grieve abundantly.

When Ermengarde had eaten, Concetta brought a comb and combed out the dull masses of her hair, then piled them up again with a great tortoise-shell pin.

"This morning I shall walk outside, Concetta."

"But last night's rain—the ground will be damp—"

"Today, somehow, I do not think that it will hurt me."

And she went out to walk in the light. As the full flood of sunshine struck her and she put her satin shoe into the damp grass, a warm soft wind flung itself about her shoulders, fluttering her black shawl. Arms, arms enfolding her—the wind was that! She rested herself against its force, closing her eyes.

"Fayrian! Fayrian!"

It whispered back to her and stirred uneasily, discontentedly; but always it touched, caressed. The dampness sank through her shoes as she walked in the grass, and as it melted through the light soles to her feet she shivered with pleasure—touch! Suddenly she wished to feel the grass with her naked feet, so she stripped off the shoes and walked with them in her hand. There was a kind of ecstasy in her contact with the ground. She caught her breath quickly.

"So he is there, too!"

With a rush of tenderness she pulled down a wet bough of blossoms so that it touched her face—kisses!

Uncertain perfume, not too sweet—the flowers seemed very dearly hers somehow; she hugged them to her, though not close enough to hurt a single petal. As the bough swung back again, petals showered upon the grass below. And she flung herself down among them, pressing her soft finger-tips against the black earth. The breeze lifted a strand of hair at the nape of her neck and murmured questioningly close to her ear.

"Fayrian! Fayrian! You are here, all around me. What do you want of me?"

She almost thought she could feel the grass growing beneath her fingers. Fayrian had wanted to die a splendid death!

Hours later she came back to the house. The servant thought she had fallen, since there was mud on her dress and face. She must have fresh clothes and food. Poor Concetta who knew so little—she always thought of food when she was helpless to offer other comfort. She pattered about the kitchen with troubled steps. When she came in later to set plates on the table she tried to speak brightly. Ermengarde followed her with a heavy gaze.

"Lady Ermengarde, it's a sweet thing, God's sunshine—"

"It is?"

"There's something about a beautiful day like this that creeps over things and into a house like—like—"

"Like a—person, Concetta!"

Ermengarde spoke the words distinctly, looking straight at her. "A person—beautiful—dissatisfied."

Concetta's eyes fairly leapt. A knife clattered to the floor.

"Oh, my lady!"

She hurried from the room, crossing herself, and the busy patter of steps rang in the kitchen again.

"Fayrian—sunshine—I love you!"

DAY followed day, and still the same enveloping presence with its piteous, insistent tugging, its desire for *something*. It was in the flame that leapt like a hungry question out of the fire. It was in the touch of water flowing over Ermengarde's hands. And always she wondered, and as she wondered her pallor heightened and her long fingers grew thinner and whiter. Could it be revenge that Fayrian wanted? What was the thing he asked for during this restless communion?

She would tell them what she had done, and they could hang her. It would not hurt now—perhaps it was what he wanted. So one morning she wrapped herself in a dark cloak and started through the gateway. As she passed, Fayrian's great hairy dog, chained to his kennel, snarled at her and showed his teeth. He knew! Soon others would know, too!

The magistrate to whom she went was very considerate. What was wrong? Could he do anything to help her? Clinging to his arm she whispered:

"Fayrian—his murder—it was I."

"What do you mean?"

His eyes were grave and kind. This time she answered aloud, trembling.

"I killed him. I put the poison in his cup—and he wanted to die a splendid death!"

A film came over the man's eyes, and he looked at her as one looks at a sick child.

"Poor lady, you have forgotten. Polevay killed him and Polevay is hanged. It is all over. Your grief has confused you."

"But he did not kill him. It was I who put the poison in the cup. Hang me; I should not mind the pain now."

She all but shook him. He caught her wrists firmly.

"You did not kill Fayrian; you

loved him. You are distraught with grief. Come, let me take you home where you can rest and calm yourself."

As they went she still tried to convince him.

"He wants revenge."

"But he has vengeance. Polevay is dead."

"Oh, but you do not know that he is here asking me every day, asking me something—it must be that! I know, I know now where the dead go—into the all-ness of things: they are one with the sun and sky and rain—did you know that?"

He shook his head.

"Ah."

Her voice sank to a whisper.

"Then you have never been haunted by an April day! He touches me in the petals of flowers. He breathes in the growing of the grass; and all the day long in the wind or rain he speaks, asking for something. He is all around me—I live in him—we are nearer in death than in life. If it is not revenge that he wants of me, what is it?"

Her voice choked with tears.

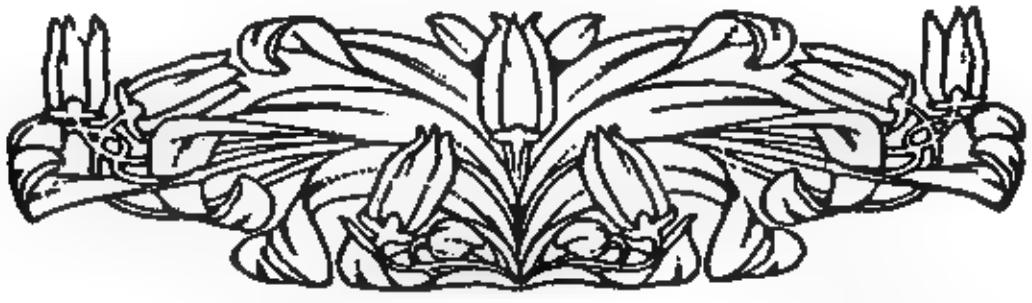
"Fayrian" (she looked up at him again) "was poisoned like a dog."

They were at the gate now, and the man left her. She watched him go back down the path, shaking his head, and she smiled, for she knew that he thought her mad. She closed her eyes. Whispers, whispers! The wind had a taste of brine in it, blowing from the sea, singing around the cliff. She would go and watch the waves and hear them, for he must be there, too, he who was a part of all things. Perhaps, somehow, she would yet be able to understand him.

SHE took the path that led away from the stone gate and twisted up to the cliff. Fayrian did not want her to be hanged, so no one would believe her. She knew he had not wanted that. The wind bore her bodily up the path in its triumphant rush. It was swift, insistent, like a restless child tugging her impatiently toward some favorite playground; and soon she was at the top, looking down into the green water with its kissing, curling waves, while the wind romped and shouted around her noisily. It blew her long hair from the comb, spilling it down her back, and flung the folds of her cloak back from her white neck. And suddenly, clearly, it seemed to roar the answer to her questionings.

What could Fayrian want? Only two things. He wanted her; and he had wished to die bravely, splendidly—she had robbed him of these. Her life, roared the wind: it was his life also, and she could send it out to death beautifully, splendidly, as he would have wished.

Standing on the edge of the cliff, she balanced herself a moment against the wind—the feel of his strong arms—and looked down into the green water. That, too, was he, waiting for her. The waves foamed and curled expectantly. She stepped over the edge of the rocks. The water rushed up to meet her; it roared about her ears; and there was a note of triumph in its song as it received the Lady Ermengarde in its embracing arms.



THE JUNGLE PRESENCE

By DICK HEINE

I BELIEVE that if I had been less fatigued mentally and physically, I should have escaped in some degree the agony of that terrible night—the night that shall never be forgotten while I linger in the flesh.

The Burman sun had finished its scorching course for the day and was sinking behind a dust-and-haze horizon, painting the sky and leaving very little breeze to cool the tired men and beasts whose day was done. The quiet of the evening fell upon me as I walked toward my bungalow through lanes of thirsty green. I had worked hard that day; the company's warehouse man would have his hands full to handle the large number of boxes I had shipped. I rested outside half an hour before going in for the bath and clean, white clothes. Then, refreshed and cool, I ate the light supper my Chinese boy, Loon Koo, had prepared for me.

The moon had risen when I went to the veranda to sit and smoke. I propped my feet up and faced the wide grove and lawn. The jagged edge of a large palm leaf hung over the face of the moon, cutting the yellow disk into triangles. I sat quietly for an hour and enjoyed pipe after pipe.

As I was thinking of retiring, I felt a hot breeze coming in from the grove. The air was hot, oppressive beyond anything I had ever experienced at evening. At once I became uneasy. The nicotine had made me restless, and a sinking, apprehensive feeling came over me. Then came the hint of the presence—the evil presence.

The realization that I was being watched filled me with a horrid dread. The thought of impending danger, an indescribable something about me that sought to do me hurt, made my heart quake with fear. A man shaking, sickened, terrorized with fear! The very shame of it cut me to the quick. I leapt to my feet and dashed into the house. My forehead was wet with sweat and my cheeks were pale. I drank some liquor and paced the room.

After three quarters of an hour I managed to brace up my nerves a little. I would not yield to the evil will of the presence without. And so, determined that I would not be driven from my own veranda by an imaginary danger, I returned to the porch and stood by a roof-post. The hot wave still prevailed, and I felt my nervousness returning. Then, as I looked into the moonlit grove, I heard a sigh very near to me; but in front, behind, or where, I could not tell—only near. A moment later there came to my nostrils a peculiar smell, a foul scent from the far-hung tangles of rotting vegetation. I stood still and thought I saw in the air before my face two little green sparks of light shining with the brilliance of polished diamonds.

My strength came. I had seen something material and feared no longer. The sweat cooled. I passed my hand before my face, and the lights were gone. I felt that I had met and conquered a foe, half material and, perhaps, half illusion. I could retire and sleep in peace.

Loon Koo slept in the rear of the bungalow and had gone to bed when I went in the second time. My room was in the front, with a window opening to the porch. I found the room cooler with the windows closed, as it barred the hot breeze.

For fifteen minutes I deliberated with myself about the needle. I ended by using it. I shot it home pitilessly and my pierced muscle quivered under the thrust. There were many little marks on my arms. I felt ashamed. But the sleep, the restful oblivion—could anything be sweeter? Before the drug had begun its work I fastened the room up tighter and lay down. It was close, of course, but why should I mind that? I should sleep; my breath came deep and long. . . .

Falling, falling through space, weightless and devoid of reason. A million miles. That's not far to fall . . . ten times a million miles. I fell, I fell, the stars and planets but sparks of light and I myself, only a small, golden pin-head. . . .

What is myself? The river was deep . . . the grass was green . . . I am taller than he is . . . his mouth is funny . . . his eyes are green . . . they are diamonds. . . What makes him move his head so? He wheezes . . . he sighs . . . that's Old Mother Hubbard . . . that spider works . . . sand . . . salt . . . water . . . blue . . . rainbow colors . . . what? Senseless and falling through space. What is space? It all happened in the fraction of a second—crazy nothings, distractions of a tortured brain. Was I dreaming? Am I dreaming? I am dreaming. . . .

Something seems awfully heavy, hot, oppressive, magnetic. It's not heavy near my face! it has no weight on my face, but down on my legs the weight is terrible. What makes it so heavy? The coverings are not pulled over me.

Spending months in a moment, decades in a second, I broke the spell and became conscious. This state constituted only a few perceptions. My eyes were closed. I was myself, resting where I always rested—in space; for I am space, the beginning and ending of space. I was somewhere. There was the evil presence, the hot presence. There hovered over me the hint of danger, not now but impending. If I knew what that danger was, I might resist.

The weight of the hint bore down upon my upper body, a spiritual weight with a crushing force. The heavy, material weight on my abdomen and legs was nothing compared to it. The greater the power of the evil, the heavier was its atmosphere. I had thought that this idea of a crushing weight had been a part of the dream, but consciousness proved it to be real.

I began to be more aware of my body. My hands were folded across my chest and suffered from the pressure. My eyes would not open. There seemed to be a power above me that kept them closed, and I did not want to open them. I felt that when they did open, I should lose the poise of my high-strung nerves. The sweat steeped from my skin. My forehead felt as if the most powerful magnet in existence were trying to draw out my brains. If I opened my eyes, the magnet would get in its work. Then it occurred to me that perhaps I had seemingly died, been buried alive, come to life again, and that the heaviness torturing me was the foul air of a coffin. I had no record of time.

Suddenly I felt the veil of weight beginning to lift. My eyelids twitched —they *would* open. Unable to resist, I opened my eyes wide.

Apparently I was in my room. The moonlight came in wan swords through the slits in the blinds. There was barely enough light to make objects perceptible. I heard a faint

sigh, though somewhat louder than the one I had heard on the veranda. Then there came that jungle odor, that putrid breath from distant wilds.

Turning my eyes upward, I perceived the cause of my terror. There, with its expanded neck and devilish head poised in a curve within six inches of my face, its eyes staring straight into the depths of mine, its body coiled on my lower limbs, was the horror of creation—a giant *cobra de capello*. . . .

SOMEHOW a strange calm came over me, and I looked away from the snake. Then I closed my eyes and accepted darkness and death. It seemed that I waited hours for the blow. If I made a movement, perhaps it would come. I decided to end the agony by moving. Just as I felt the muscles respond for the movement of my legs, I changed my mind—what little reason I had left. I would try though. . .

I thought of Koo. If he were asleep, I could not wake him by sound, but perhaps I could by thought. I turned on the full current. Koo . . . Koo . . . Koo . . . Koo . . . Koo. . . . A hundred times I thought his name and blessed his yellow skin. . . .

After what seemed an interminable period I heard a light footfall somewhere. I opened my eyes. A silent flash streamed toward me from the other side of the room near the hall door. The snake lifted its coils from my lower limbs, its oppressive magnetism from my upper body, and with a mighty leap, collected its length in a writhing mass upon the bedroom floor.

Koo had risked my life by piercing the snake's head with a silencer-bullet just a fraction of a second before it was to have struck. The leap from the bed was aided by the tense muscles prepared for the blow at me.

I sprang from the bed and switched on the light. Loon Koo stood with pistol trained on the now harmless head, and the reptile's reflex action thrashed its tail about the floor.

"How did you know, Koo?" I cried.

"Hot bleeze die down . . . night cool off . . . me feelem dwaft and wakee. Hear something in hall . . . see slaykee . . . hunt long time for gun . . . then shoot. . . ."

And Koo smiled, calm and collected, as is ever his kind.

I looked into the mirror. To attest the agony I had suffered I saw that my eyebrows stood straight out from the skin, and my forehead was speckled with little beads of sweated blood!

THE readers of WEIRD TALES have spoken in no uncertain terms. Every mail brings to the editor's desk letters protesting against any lessening of the "weird" quality of the stories in this magazine. "Let WEIRD TALES remain weird" is the tenor of the communications; "you have a magazine that prints a type of stories we can get nowhere else, and if a few of your readers are horrified by gruesome tales, then let them go elsewhere; but don't spoil the magazine for those of us who like eery fiction."

"Keep WEIRD TALES weird and succeed," writes Fred E. Norris, of Huntington, West Virginia.

"Please do not lessen by one degree the horror of your tales," writes Mrs. J. Ruopp, of Los Angeles.

"WEIRD TALES would disregard its slogan, 'The Unique Magazine,' if it failed to give us those stories which are unique," writes Ruth E. Sapulos, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

There are a few voices on the other side. L. Phillips, Jr., of Berkeley, California, writes: "It seems to me that there are plenty of ideas for weird and hair-raising stories without invading the graves of the dead. I think you should cut out what you term the 'necrophilic'. The old 'Black Cat' was one of the most widely read magazines of its day. They went in for the weird and unusual, too, but they never printed anything sane people would turn from in disgust. No rotting corpses in theirs. The mysterious, the supernatural, the startling and bizarre from all lands and all times—I wouldn't place a single limitation on locale, historical period or race, but I would draw the line at the grave. Even in fiction the dead have a right to rest in peace."

The vote of our readers, to date, is overwhelmingly in favor of a few horror stories in each issue. But those who want cannibalistic and blood-drinking stories (specifically those who indorse Mr. Eddy's "The Loved Dead" and Mr. Miller's "The Hermit of Ghost Mountain") are as few as those who want no horror stories at all. We bow before the decision that has been made by you, the readers; and along with other bizarre and weird tales we shall continue to print horror stories—but they will be clean.

We recently attended a performance of "Romeo and Juliet"; and as we heard Jane Cowl deliver Juliet's speech before she takes the poison, we realized that the same speech, if published in a WEIRD TALES story, would be denounced by some of our indignant readers (not many, but surely by some) as "gruesome", "shocking", "offensive". A few of our good friends would undoubtedly write letters asking us why we so offended against good taste as

to draw such a "disgusting" picture of Juliet awaking at midnight in the vault,

> "Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
> Of all my buried ancestors are packed;
> Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
> Lies festering in his shroud; where, as they say,
> At some hours of the night spirits resort:—
> Alack, alack! is it not like that I,
> So early waking—what with loathsome smells,
> And shrieks like mandrakes' torn out of the earth,
> That living mortals, hearing them, run mad—
> Oh, if I wake, shall I not lie distraught,
> Environed with all these hideous fears,
> And madly play with my forefathers' joints,
> And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
> And in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
> As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?"

But there will be no indignant letters, because we have quoted this from the thousand-souled Shakespeare. And what about "Hamlet", with the stage strewn with dead bodies in the last act? And the ghost of "the blood-boltered Banquo" at Macbeth's banquet? And that gruesome scene where Macbeth washes his hands of the murdered Duncan's blood:

> "What hands are these? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red."

We fear Shakespeare would fare quite badly at the hands of some of our readers. And the gentle Poe, who is still America's favorite author, and growing in popularity year by year (although the man himself died poor and neglected seventy-five years ago)—how would Poe fare if he were writing today? Hardly better than he fared during his life. But the weird tales of that great master remain as a precious heritage to the whole world.

Considering the present unceasing popularity of the works of this great master of weird literature, we have no fear for the future of WEIRD TALES so long as the magazine remains weird.

And now a word as to the series of true tales of witchcraft by Seabury Quinn, which begins in the March issue under the title of "Servants of Satan". Mr. Quinn is familiar to the readers of WEIRD TALES as author of the series of "Weird Crimes", and also "The Phantom Farmhouse" and "Out of the Long Ago".

The first four stories deal with witchcraft in America; the first one, next month, being "The Salem Horror". These stories are an important contribution to American historical literature. Mr. Quinn does more than merely transmute the musty court records and transcripts of evidence into fascinating true narratives as gripping as any fiction: he takes the readers into the atmosphere and spirit of old Salem, and makes you know the historic figures of our superstitious New England forefathers as if you were there in person. This is high art. And Mr. Quinn's narratives are as unbiased as they are vivid.

"Most writers, commenting on the Salem delusion," Quinn writes in a letter to the editor, "are inclined to find excuses for it in the superstitious

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state of the public mind, but I'm inclined to think that if there were any devil in Salem Village, it was the Rev. Mr. Parris. Queer thing about that Salem business: an ancestor of mine, one John Alden—*not* the character in Longfellow's poem—was arrested in that same time and accused of being in league with the devil, but emulated the example of three Tyrian brethren and made his escape."

Mr. Quinn, in his "Servants of Satan" series, has been fair to all parties to that dark business—even to the Rev. Mr. Parris.

E. L. Middleton, of Los Angeles, writes to The Eyrie:

"Occasionally some other magazine comes out with a pretty good 'spirit' story, but none of these excels some of those in WEIRD TALES. 'The House of Dust' in the November issue is particularly attractive, as well as is 'The Malignant Entity' in the Anniversary Number. Your magazine is creating a distinct type of literature which will last. In my opinion these stories of terror and fear are not unwholesome, but, rather, quicken the imagination to a desirable degree, and in no way do they have the deteriorating influence of the sex stories which are published in great numbers, nor do they have a tendency to cause crime as do the crime thrillers in print and in the pictures.

"There seems to be one great remaining field of literature which has not yet been covered, and which some author might cover some time by a story in WEIRD TALES. I refer to that section of Biblical prophecy which deals with the end of the world and its millennium, more particularly known to Bible students as 'The Great Tribulation.' From various verses in the Bible, a rather elaborate program of the 'Time of the End' is built up, telling how the Devil, in the guise of some great religious power, shall rule the world for seven years and shall be destroyed finally when the millennium is ushered in. A story dealing with this period could be written without being sectarian or religious or without quoting Scripture, and make a good story—nothing more—and not try to prove any particular prophecy, but rather deal with a possible future destiny of the human race."

We refer this last suggestion to our author friends. WEIRD TALES would gladly consider such a story, but it would have to be well written, absorbingly interesting, and it must not offend religious feeling. That excellent magazine, "Romance" (unfortunately it is no longer printed), had the courage to print a weird tale dealing with the crucifixion, and called "The Doomsday Envelope"; and WEIRD TALES will shortly print a remarkable story, reverently told by Arthur J. Burks, called "When the Graves Were Opened", based on the statement in the New Testament that the graves were opened and the dead went immediately into the city. It tells what the dead did when they went into Jerusalem.

The readers' favorite story in the December issue was "Death-Waters," by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. This story was closely pressed for first honors by "The Death Clinic," by Otto E. A. Schmidt; "The Valley of Teeheemen," by Arthur Thatcher; "The Earth Girl," by Carroll K. Michener, and "A Hand From the Deep," by Romeo Poole. The votes for favorite story were widely distributed; there was hardly a single story in the issue that did not draw one or more votes for first choice.

What is your favorite story in the present issue? Send your choice in to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 317 Baldwin Building, Indianapolis, Ind. It is only by finding out what stories you, the readers, like, that we are able to know what kind to publish for you in the future.

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THE SALEM HORROR

By SEABURY QUINN

TAKING his facts from court records, the author has transmuted this most terrible period of American history into fascinatingly vivid narratives that take the reader back into the atmosphere of horror, fear and public hysteria which led to the unbelievable torture and execution of innocent old women by our Puritan ancestors of New England.

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Whispering Tunnels

(Continued from Page 24)

emy's hands an hour after he had fired the magazine.

"For the first time, *messieurs,*" said the colonel, "the truth is known. DeBray must have wrecked the floodgate control days before he fired the magazine. He would have blown up the magazine regardless of whether Chaumon had discovered his treachery, as part of his bargain to aid the enemy. As it was, he saw a chance to carry out his plan and at the same time destroy, as he thought, the evidence. I think you will agree with me that the statement 'dead men tell no tales' is one of the most ridiculous ever coined."

The colonel reached swiftly for pen and ink, and wrote out a telegram. It was coded in ciphers, known only to the French army, but when translated it called for the arrest of DeBray!

"My friends," said "Papa" Dupin to the Americans, "you have served France well. She owes you an infinite debt of gratitude that she can never repay. But as long as either of you live, there is no favor too great to ask of the French military service, which will ever be at your disposal. Won't you remain a while longer, as my guests, now that you have cleared the name of Jules Chaumon?"

The Americans thanked the colonel, but explained that they must return to Paris without further delay. The commandant shook his head disapprovingly, but embraced them both as they left his office. Outside, in the corridor, Cresson experienced a feeling of relief over the prospect of leaving behind this labyrinth of mystery and death. He shivered as he took a long look inside of the haunted chamber.

"Our discoveries show us why there happened to be a number of apparitions in this room simultaneously," said Littlejohn, sagely. "The anteroom in olden days must have been an altar for devil worship, for the strongest forces issued there. That trap-door leading to the tunnels must, indeed, hold a dreadful history. There are hundreds of entities that still rove the distant tunnels, but so far as Vaux is concerned, the malignant curse is gone. The fort was built over ancient, underground dungeons, where hundreds were put to torture for sorcery up to a hundred years ago. Many were the curses placed upon the whole region, and some, as you have seen, are still active."

"Don't talk about it, doctor," pleaded the younger man. "I'm getting all unnerved. Let's get out of these hills."

Littlejohn laughed, noticing Cresson's expression of anxiety.

"Do you know what day this is?" asked the scientist.

"September seventh, of course," replied Cresson.

He started suddenly.

"The day Audrey is to marry DeBray! How could I have forgotten it?"

He fairly groaned as he snatched his watch from his pocket.

"Three o'clock!" he exclaimed dismally. "And the wedding is at 7! Oh, if I could get to Paris in time! I can't even send her a telegram, for it would be held up by the censors until too late."

"You do love her, don't you, my boy?" asked Littlejohn, his eyes twinkling with humor and understanding.

Cresson started with astonishment, as his eyes met those of his friend.

"How did you know, doctor?" he gasped.

"Knew it the day after you called, in Paris," laughed Littlejohn. "You gave yourself away. Little things, you know. All my life I have been an observer."

He walked away mysteriously, leaving the southerner in a study of dejection. Ten minutes later the scientist returned, rubbing his hands together briskly.

"Get ready for a fast trip to Paris!" he exclaimed.

"Quick trip? Why, doctor, how?" asked the puzzled southerner.

"Airplane, of course, numskull!" answered Littlejohn, waggishly. "An automobile will call here for you in ten minutes. Colonel Dupin has arranged everything. A plane awaits you at Gallieni Field!"

TWO hours later, Cresson was hastening to Madame Chaumon's home in the Latin Quarter. He arrived just as the finishing touches were being made to Audrey's bridal costume, ten minutes before going to the church, where the ceremony was to be performed. It was most difficult for Cresson to break the news, and for a full two minutes he could not respond to the joyous greeting of the two women. But it was his duty, and glossing over the most harrowing details of the story, he told it from beginning to end.

Madame Chaumon exhibited remarkable control, but Audrey, who was worn with the ordeal of awaiting marriage with the man she despised, was less able to bear up. She swooned, pale as death, as Cresson concluded his narrative. She recovered consciousness in the southerner's arms, her violet eyes widening, as he pillowed her head of glorious gold on his arm.

In one mad moment, Cresson threw restraint to the winds and pressed his

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lips to hers in a divine moment of bliss. Her arms stole around his neck, and joy surged within him as he felt his kisses being returned. It seemed as if the world stood still to listen to the caroling of a million joyous bird throats.

"Oh, Audrey," he breathed, "I love you! Can't you see? My happiness is in your hands; my future is yours. Be my wife, dear. Come to America with me—to Louisiana, where your mother and you will know no sorrow again. Forget the past. Awaiting you is the home of my forefathers. It is a great house. It is cheerful, beautiful, restful. The trees and landscape will ever remind you of *La Belle France*. Have you ever heard of New Orleans, its French patois, its quaintness and charm? Say you will, dear!"

"On condition," she replied, her eyes shyly seeking his, "that I shall spend six months of every year in your beautiful Louisiana, and the other six months in *La Belle France*—always with you. You do not know, Miles, dear, what it means to a Frenchwoman to be exiled, forever, from her native land. Such a fate would be unthinkable!"

She nestled in his arms.

"Agreed!" Cresson shouted, happily. "That is a wonderful plan."

He lost no time in seeking Madame Chaumon's consent, which she gave, with the mingled tears of her blessing. The evening seemed to fly, and the joyous little dinner in a café near by, in honor of the event, seemed over in a flash.

IN THE small hours of the morning Cresson danced forth from the lift seemingly on air. He came face to face with Dr. Littlejohn in the entrance.

"Why, doctor," exclaimed the younger man, "how did you reach Paris so quickly?"

His astonishment was apparent.

"Congratulations, son," said Littlejohn, stretching out his hand. "You needn't tell me—I know! I followed you by a fast train, and here I am."

"I owe everything to you, doctor," began Cresson gratefully. "You're the greatest, finest—."

"Oh, forget that," laughed Littlejohn. "It was an experience to gladden the heart of any spook hunter in existence. And, as sailors say, you may lay to that!"

His face grew grave.

"Have you heard?" he queried, quietly.

"About DeBray, you mean?" asked Cresson.

"Yes," said the doctor. "He was seized by gendarmes while dressing for his wedding. He put up a furious struggle, and for a time the officers had their hands full. He was raging and defiant in the Palais de la Justice, until confronted with the evidence. In the end, he signed a lengthy confession.

"DeBray feared death, after Chaumon's discovery of his treachery. He waited for an opportunity to shoot the young Frenchman in the back, but this did not come. He had already wrecked the floodgate machinery and had laid wires to blow up the magazine, and his opportunity to effect a double stroke came when Chaumon and the thirty-three men were sent to the vault during the attack. The death of Major Callan in the final rush of the enemy left DeBray in possession of the secret of Chaumon's whereabouts. None, except the Alsatian, knew that the anteroom passage existed, and he slipped there,

during a lull, to send part of the fort to destruction with his blasting machine. He resumed his post in the confusion that followed; no one was the wiser, save those buried beneath the wreckage. Dying men alone knew that his act had cost them their lives and France its fortress.

"It was dramatic, Cresson. I reached the Palais just as DeBray, coolly smoking a cigarette, was addressing his captors.

"'*Messieurs,*' he said,, 'after all, what matters another victim to Madame Guillotine? The world goes on as usual, does it not? My death leaves but one more shade to curse it, and the tunnels of Verdun!'

"DeBray's hearers were all so dumfounded by his cold-blooded confession that for a moment they relaxed vigilance. It was the traitor's opportunity. Before any one could stay him, the Alsatian had snatched a pistol from the holster of a guard, and was springing to the center of the room. He pressed the weapon's muzzle to his temple. The guards ran forward in a confused mass, but too late. The pistol cracked, and DeBray crashed to the flags, dead by his own hand."

Cresson shook his head slowly, but said nothing. Memories of Jules Chaumon trooped across his vision in a dim procession; memories of the Vosges; memories of Verdun; Paris of war-time, and Paris of today. Dr. Littlejohn, observing his silence, understood. He pressed the younger man's arm, and bade him good-night.

Walking slowly toward his quarters, Cresson heard, far down the boulevard, the cry of "extras" being vended by newsboys of the Quarter.

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That White Superiority

By GEORGE BALLARD BOWERS

"IN WHAT, O Saking, do my people excel thine?"

Thus I questioned Saking, seer of the Mayoyao Igorots, mountaineers of the Philippines. A strange question for a white man to put to a naked, untutored savage? No, for be it known that the simple pagans consider themselves quite the equal, if not the superior, of any other race of whatever color.

But the question, coming from me, troubled Saking. How could he acknowledge openly that my race was in any way superior to his, even though I commanded the soldiers protecting his people from the head-hunting Gaddaans dwelling beyond the dividing mountain range?

Saking had yet another fear: he had no desire to offend me.

"*Apo commandante,*" he began in his native tongue, "thy poor servant returned to his own roof only yesterday from Manila, where he had been sent to bring back stories of the wonders there created by the gods of the white man. Give thy servant Saking but an hour to ponder, then he will answer."

Saking's enigmatic request is plain to those who understand the untutored pagan. That which the pagan Malay does not understand he attributes to the gods. All the phenomena of nature: the rain, the lightning flash, the growth of plants, life and death, are to him inexplicable; hence they are the work of his gods. Automobiles, telephones, electric lights, street cars, steamships and radio were equally incomprehensible to the pagan mind; therefore they were the work of the gods of the white race possessing them. The handiwork of the gods not being comparable, something of purely human effort must be found for comparison.

The Mayoyao Igorots are agriculturists, driven by enemies, in centuries past, into the deep valleys of northern Luzon, where they have terraced the mountain slopes to an amazing height. Some terraces are five thousand feet above the valley floor. The irrigation of the tiny terraced fields created many problems; their solution frequently involved engineering feats worthy of the study of our modern college-trained engineers.

Saking had secured his tribal standing through his solution of the local irrigation problems; that skill he attributed to his own knowledge applied without the aid of the ancestral gods; so in irrigation he might make a comparison of the two races, white and brown. It had long been acknowledged as a fact that no Igorot could make water run up hill. If any Igorot had ever been bold enough to assert such power he would have been promptly labeled a fool. This knowledge and assurance gave Saking a cue. Were he to attribute such an impossible power to the white race his people would interpret his assertion as one of tact rather than fact.

Before the hour had passed Saking returned to answer my question.

"O wise *commandante,* truly I have found one effort in which thy race excels mine. Thy people need only to drive hollow pipes into the ground to make the water shoot high into the air, from whence it falls back to the earth like rain. Thy—people—can — make — water — run — up—hill."

Saking had seen a fountain.

Crossed Lines

(Continued from Page 32)

with my feet, hunched my body, moved slightly. Enough! I had it.

Summoning every ounce of my remaining strength, I swung it at his head. I must have lost consciousness even before the blow landed, for I have no recollection of the completion of the stroke.

How much later it was that consciousness returned, I never knew. It was with some difficulty that I opened my eyes. The lids seemed gummed together. It was still dark. I put my hand to my face and found it wet, or rather sticky. That must mean blood. My head ached excruciatingly. His body was yet interlocked with mine and I could feel his labored breathing. So, he was still alive and reviving. I must look to myself. I felt about me in the darkness for my weapon, and not finding it I arose to my feet. He likewise arose. He was coming after me again. Once more, I felt his fingers at my throat, but at their touch a thrill of surprize ran through me. Just why, I was unable to say, but in the touch of those unseen hands there was something startlingly different from what I had expected. I grappled with him and hurled him bodily across the room, heard a chair turn over, and his body come with a thud against the wall.

Groping, I found the doorway leading to the adjoining room, and bumped my head against the lintel above. The doorway was low, but that had never happened before. How strange familiar surroundings seem in the dark! I reached around the door jamb, touched the button, and switched on the light.

I looked at my hand, one finger yet resting on the button, and under-

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standing came to me. I looked, and elation welled up in me; for now I knew what had happened, even before, following the direction of the light streaming through the open door, I saw his small, mean figure crouching against the wall. He, too, saw and knew that during that second period, while we lay devoid of consciousness, that which had happened the first time had been undone. Each had come into his own again.

His jaw dropped and his eyes bulged with terror. Then he began glancing this way and that, swallowing and moistening his lips with his tongue. I laughed, and there was the lust of slaughter in the laugh. All the days and weeks of misery and persecution at his hands it was now in my power to avenge. I approached him slowly and deliberately, and he seemed positively to shrivel with terror. I can well imagine what he must have seen in my face, for in that moment it was my intention to tear him limb from limb.

It brings a cold sweat upon me to this day, when I think back upon that moment. Standing on the very threshold of life restored, with an appreciation such as I had never possessed before of all its glorious opportunities, how close I was to ruining all by the perpetration of a crime whose penalty would have been my own life!

Thank God! The blood lust passed from me in time. In this quaking wretch I saw the image of what I had been but a little while since. I pitied his terror—or was it merely the return of my old contempt for others weaker than myself? At all events, I stood from his path and pointed toward the outer door. With a rat-like squeak, suggestive of mingled fear and relief, he scuttled to the door and passed through it, out of my life forever.

SUCH was the story told me by my fellow traveler in the smoking car of the train as we neared Chicago. My friend, Horace Chillingworth, who, like myself, had listened to the stranger's narrative, stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"And the scar—the scar above your temple?" Chillingworth asked him.

"It is the mark of the blow by which I felled the scoundrel who had usurped my body," he answered.

"Englewood!" the conductor had called. It was here that we were to leave the train. We had waited nearly too long and there was no time to be lost.

We walked down through the station to the street level. My companion seemed deep in thought. The sound of the train, bearing with it our late fellow occupant of the smoker, had died away in the distance and we were in front of the house where Chillingworth lives, before either of us spoke.

"Will you come up to my room for a moment?" he then asked. "I want to show you something in my vast collection of newspaper and magazine clippings."

I agreed.

Selecting a cardboard letter-file, he produced from it a clipping and handed it to me. This is what I read:

There is something of a mystery surrounding the severance of Dr. Theophilus Cameroon's connection with the Issaquah Emergency Hospital. His former colleagues, while stanchly denying that there exists occasion for anything of the kind, maintain a discreet reticence as to the events leading up to it. Rumor will not down that the doctor's resignation was not entirely voluntary and connects it with certain experiments abhorrent to public sentiment and to

other eminent members of his own profession.

I looked at Chillingworth, interrogatively.

"Try this one," he said, handing me another clipping.

It was rather a long article, and with a pencil he marked a part of it, neither at the beginning nor the end. This was the portion he had marked:

Every physical body has a so-called astral counterpart. Ordinarily its position coincides with the physical body, in a manner that may be conceived of by comparison with a bone which is composed of both animal and mineral matter. Either can be removed and the bone retain its original size and shape. Though the weight of the astral body is very small according to physical standards, owing to the extreme attenuation of the matter composing it, it is a ponderable factor and it is claimed that a delicate apparatus has registered a slight loss of weight in a body, occurring at the moment of death.

The astral body is the seat of consciousness, and when a human or other animal becomes unconscious, the astral body hovers about, swaying gently in the air currents. It is too ethereal to be visible ordinarily to the physical eye, but under favorable circumstances has been photographed.

It is connected with the physical body by a sort of cord, and according to occult tradition, if this were cut, the human or animal to which it belongs would die.

"You think—?" I gasped.

"That the lines somehow got crossed and the astral and physical bodies recombined wrong," he replied. "What part, if any, Dr. Cameroon played in the transaction is matter for speculation."

"But—my dear fellow!—why, that is preposterous!"

"Perhaps," said Chillingworth. "Perhaps it is. But you must remember that our knowledge of life and its possibilities is less than one trillionth of one per cent."

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The Tomb-Dweller

(Continued from Page 44)

no more. Lingering about the deserted dwelling, I noticed that the small windows had been closed with mortar and stone. This aroused my curiosity, and I resolved to make inquiry concerning it if I could find anyone in the vicinity.

I had passed a new residence on the highway shortly before entering the avenue that led to the cemetery gate, and I thought it likely that the present caretaker lived there. However, as I was leaving the grounds I saw a man approaching, carrying a rake and trowel. He appeared to be the person sought, so I saluted him and stated that, having had a slight acquaintance with the man who had occupied the stone house several years before, I should like to know what had become of him.

"He died about two years ago under very peculiar circumstances," was the reply. "He was a strange character! I didn't know him and never saw him until after he died, but I shall not forget him. I only wish I could. It was thought he had been dead a week or more before any one missed him. There was a lot of bad weather about that time and no one happened to come to the cemetery for quite a while. I was a newcomer then and lived in the village. It happened that I was one of those who came out here to investigate when word came that it was thought something was wrong. We could get no response when we called to the man and were unable to get into the house. It was impossible to see through the windows, so we broke one of them. A nauseating odor filled the air as the glass fell and we saw a horrible sight.

"A large stone coffin stood along the opposite wall. It was mostly covered by a lid that fitted down inside the edge. There was an opening at one end of it, and we saw the discolored face of the old man lying in the coffin. His head appeared to be bolstered up and was turned toward the window, so we could see it plainly.

"His features were contorted in a hideous manner. The mouth was distended and the protruding tongue was terribly swollen and black. The glassy eyes were wide open and seemed about to burst. The expression of dumb agony in them was enough to curdle one's blood.

"Both arms were thrust out and upward, the bony fingers clutching a sort of framework at the head of the coffin. Some clothing that had evidently been hanging on the frame was scattered around in confusion. It was plain that the poor fellow had for some reason been unable to raise the lid and had struggled vainly to draw himself out through the opening at the head of the coffin. Caught like a rat in a trap he had died of thirst and hunger, with food and water on a table almost within his reach. It must have been a fearful death.

"We closed the windows as you see them to keep morbid persons from flocking here to see the gruesome sight, and then left him undisturbed. From what we saw in the room, the old man had intended the building to serve as a tomb as well as a home. People that knew him say he was very eccentric, and I think he must have been. It certainly is odd for a man to prepare his own tomb and then spend years of his life in it, but I suppose he had a good reason for making such an unusual arrangement. It might not have been a bad plan, either, for a man who had renounced the world as he appeared to have done, if the coffin lid had not become refractory and acted as a trap to bury him alive."

Into the Fourth

(Continued from Page 48)

entered the very home of chaos. A great wind buffeted me and with it came eery faces that peered and gibbered into my own. Trailing arms, like tentacles, clutched at me, slithered across my body; dank hair brushed my face like seaweed. Prehensile fingers strove to seize me, tentatively. I was in the midst of a great throng of disorganized, or half-organized forces; half human, yet possessing no suggestion of human companionship. Horror overcame me. I bent my head, covered my face with my arms and blundered forward.

"I succeeded in turning, and dashed madly in what seemed the direction whence I had come. And in a moment that was an eternity I fell, fell through ages of time, through interminable space, and found myself lying inert, supine, upon the floor of Carrington's study.

"For a time I lay staring with unseeing eyes, until at last my straying mind grew calmer and I rose to my feet to see once more the familiar things of my own life. Familiar? Yes and no. Everything seemed reversed. The hands of a clock on the desk ran backward; the door by which I had entered the study was now at the opposite end of the room, and when I essayed to walk, I found that I must walk backward. I thought I spoke in a low tone—I found myself shrieking. It was strange that the occupants of the house failed to hear me. A glimmering of the truth entered my brain and I experimented elementally. I spelled the word 'cat'—but I spelled it 'tac', with the letters running backward as in a mirror. I crossed the room, averting my gaze from that now hateful aperture behind which, or within which, such horrors lay. Leaving the room, I proceeded down the corridor and into what was evidently a sort of lumber room, and there I

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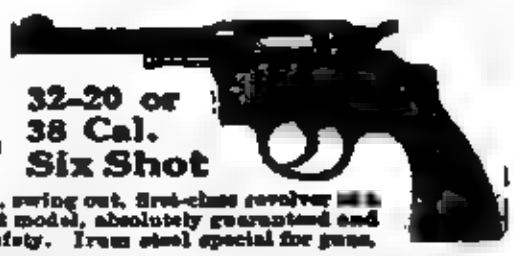

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sank down behind an old lounge to think.

"I remained there till light came, when, feeling myself secure from probable intrusion and discovery, I set myself laboriously to writing this record—backward.

"Afterward with much difficulty I copied the statement. But the writing, the formation even of the letters, is strange and unlike my own hand, as you will see. I mean to seal this statement in an envelope and address it to Mrs. Burke's place. I shall drop it from the window thus addressed, in the hope that someone will find and leave it for me at the house. It will bear your name also. Do as you wish with it, as I said in my note, which I have written and will attach to this. I don't expect you to understand it—I do not myself.

"I shall stay here, stealing food if there is any to be had. I cannot go out into the street like this—and oddly enough, I do not want to leave. *For I am going back!*

"Something is calling—calling. I know I will heed the call and I may never return. I do not care. Somehow, life could never be the same again. . . Good-bye, Syd.

"ORLANDO PARKES."

THUS ended the remarkable statement, and when the notes by Carrington, despite their brevity and disjointed character, were found to more or less corroborate the account of Parkes' adventure, the chief and the learned faculty of the university were forced to give credence to the matter. The fragments that follow lend an air of finality to the episode.

"November 10.—Someone is in the house—someone besides William and myself; I mean an intruder. I am nervous, perhaps, lest something occur on this, the eve of my triumph.

"November 11.—Who says we have reached the limits of investigation in any branch of science? If anyone makes such a statement he reckons without his host. There are no limits. I have proved this to my own satisfaction. It remains to prove it to the world. We are pigmies in knowledge—even I who am head and shoulders above the average student (nor do I say it boastfully) am a child when the potentialities of experiment and investigation are considered. The span of a man's life in this plane is inadequate to carry to its fullest extent (if there be any end) an inquiry into the great secrets of existence.

"For years have I studied the problem of the fourth dimension. It is an acknowledged fact, by some profound mathematicians, that it exists, not as an entity, perhaps, but as a point in the science of mathematics. There is nothing absurd in the conception, even if it be only hypothesis. If we can conceive of a two or three dimensional space, we cannot deny the possibility of a fourth. Suppose the investigators are baffled in attempting to define it. Who can define electricity or energy? A few have almost reached the secret. Witness the experiments of the German Von Schlegel, and even our own Paul Heyl. They have constructed solid projections of fourth dimensional structures. But I have overtaken and passed them.

"I stand at the threshold of the unknown—and I tremble. That presence in the house—who—what can it be? Perhaps—pshaw, I am growing fanciful! Why am I writing these notes—I who have always been the soul of method? Relaxation? Possibly.

"My deductions—all I have attained in knowledge of my theory—no—facts—facts—are embodied in the manuscript volume in my desk in the study. These I shall publish to the world—afterward!

"The gateway to the unknown!

". . . Someone *is* here—someone

or something. I have found traces of food (I keep material for an occasional light lunch in the pantry) scattered about. So the intruder is flesh and blood. Tonight William and I will go over every foot of the house—

". . . Great God—he has *gone through!*

"The vibrations tell me plainer than words . . . and he has returned. It was the vibratory motion following the second disturbance of the curtain that decided me. If he can go and come at will, I can do the same. I had hesitated, I admit it. The instinct of self-preservation is strong . . . I owe the intruder my gratitude. He had the courage I lacked.

"I saw him—it is a man. And he has gone back into the unknown. *I saw him go!* Saw him plunge through—and vanish. And I will follow.

"What shall I find behind the curtain? I might guess—but to guess is unscientific. This is the last that I shall write—unless I return. I will leave these notes and other things, such as my will, in the dispatch box . . . Tonight—"

THAT was all. The manuscript volume, sad to say, was lost in the fire, the origin of which will never be known. And the fatal aperture, "the gateway to the unknown"—is it sealed forever? Or will the mystery be solved as it was by Carrington?

Somewhere in the void, those two are drifting—the scientist and the burglar. Perhaps, even now, they are at our elbows seeking to communicate, silently petitioning us to open the door that will let them back again into the wholesome world of men. Will they ever return? Who can say? What one man has done another may do, and some day the gateway may again swing wide for those two poor souls who have passed through into the uncharted realms of illimitable space.

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Wings of Power

(Continued from Page 145)

"Attempted murder a personal matter!"

The Irishman's temper was up, proving him a poor nurse, but both men had forgotten the need of precaution.

"Who was it, Phil? You might as well tell me, for if you don't, I'll find out somehow!"

Olivier sat half up, leaning on an elbow. His dark eyes burned into those of his friend.

"Stop it! Stop it! Stop it, I tell you—"

He gasped, and then fainted against the pillow.

Quinn's cry of alarm summoned Dr. Graetz, waiting anxiously outside the door, and he uttered an exclamation of despair as he bent over his patient.

Frenziedly Dr. Graetz worked over the limp body of Olivier. He and the consulting physician administered the potent injection, and then stood tense, waiting to see its effect. Five, ten minutes passed, and another injection was necessary. To the stethoscope, the faintest flicker of a heartbeat was perceptible. Another five minutes of suspense, and there came a third injection. The three men hung over the bed where life and death fought it out. Olivier's lean face was twisted.

The beginning of the death rattle, thought Quinn in his agony. But the two doctors, watching closely, knew better. It hung on a thread, this life—the drawing of a breath—but as they watched, there came the very faintest acceleration in the slow beat of the pulse. Still they held their breath, but it grew imperceptibly in strength. The stethoscope again, and Graetz, working swiftly, administered a last injection. There was no doubt of it now! The awful moment was past. The young doctor, holding tenaciously to life, fighting off encroaching shadows, would come through in time.

FOR a year Joan had longed for the West Indies. The thought of the old house at Montserrat where she had passed her childhood, the formal garden where so many happy hours had been spent, had twisted her heart, but now that she was there once more, its charm somehow failed to move her. She was restless, dissatisfied, despondent. She took to wandering along the path that led from the garden to the cliffs by the sea. In the restless surge of the waters she read the story of the moods that alternately flooded her being. She wanted something, she was struggling toward some memory, but always it eluded her.

Sometimes, though, a dim vision would come to her—a fleeting vision that had about it all the unreality of a dream. In that borderland between the two personalities that held her at different times in their grip, she would see herself, a dim, far-off picture, in the arms of Philip Olivier, as she had been on that memorable day when he told her he loved her, when he begged her to fight off the strange, secondary personality.

But these visions, dim and unreal as they were, occurred only too rarely to Joan. Afterwards she would press her hands to her head, spent from the struggle to break through the baffling walls of memory, and try to piece out the puzzle.

"Why did you bring me back here, Susan?" she would ask, and Susan, whose one thought was to restore her bonny lamb to her old sunny spirits, would be in despair.

"But, my wee one, 'twas yourself always begged to come back! I

thought it would be a surprize—a pleasant surprize—for you, and for once I approved of something your stepfather suggested."

"I know, I know. Forgive me, Susan. I am horrid to you these days, but I am so—so unhappy! What I want is not here. And yet—what is it I want? Sometimes I seem to find it, dimly, as if I were dreaming. At other times, not at all." Then, suddenly turning to Susan, "Tell me, Susan, is there, has there ever been—insanity in our family?"

Susan's laugh reassured Joan. The two were seated at the window in the girl's room, where Susan had been sewing, but as Joan bent forward now to press her face against the window-pane, they both caught sight of Lord Hubert in the garden below. As usual he wore the white linens of the tropics, and as usual, he carried his butterfly net and magnifying glass in his hand. Lord Hubert so obviously lived in a narrow world of his own egotism, wrapped up in the butterflies and beetles that should bring him lasting fame as an entomologist, that the forthright Scotchwoman sniffed as she caught sight of him.

"Yon's the first member of the Charing or Suffern families to show wee signs of being daft," she muttered, "wrapped up in his dry bugs all his life long, letting the professor appoint himself your guardian, never caring what happens to any member of his family so long as he is left alone with his own pride and ambitions!"

Joan looked at her somberly.

"Uncle Hubert is a famous scientist, Susan. All famous people are self-centered."

JOAN and Susan were not the only ones whose eyes were upon Lord Hubert in his garden. Professor Kurt Maquarri and Felix, installed in the former's study, had spied him there, and, secure from interruption, they mapped out their plans. Maquarri

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crossed to the table on which stood the wishing machine, and picked up what looked like a well-balanced magnifying glass. It was a new glass, and the frame and handle were of a metal that had a strange, mercurial luster, but Felix's interest was at first perfunctory.

"See, my friend, I made it myself," said Maquarri. "Do you see nothing peculiar about the frame and the handle?"

Felix bent over to examine it more closely. He rubbed a finger testingly over the metal, and it seemed to him that there came from it the faintest phosphorescent emanation.

"It's not—surely it's not zodium, this handle?"

Maquarri nodded, his expression gloating and triumphant.

"It is zodium. I fashioned it myself. The best of lenses, you understand, but while you take your stand here at the wishing machine, I shall seek out Lord Hubert and ask him to examine a few new specimens with this new and more powerful glass."

Felix obviously waited for a more complete unfolding of the plot, and Maquarri, well pleased, continued.

"I shall pretend I am about to write a monograph on the Yucca moth, and I want him to tell me if I have left out anything of importance. You, Felix, shall stay here meanwhile at the wishing machine and influence his mind to tell me the treasure's hiding place."

"It is time, Maestro. I doubt that we have many days more. I overheard this morning that Lord Hubert plans to go to St. John's on the afternoon boat with his architect. The Charing bankers are there, and it may well be that he is arranging to convert the gold and jewels into currency for his million dollar museum."

Professor Kurt Maquarri sought out Lord Hubert Charing in his long study at the back of the house, under the slant of the hurricane roof. Lord Hubert was flattered that the professor should ask his advice. He was an acknowledged authority on the Yucca moth, which was somewhat outside Lord Hubert's field, and he bent over the specimen eagerly.

Maquarri watched him keenly. At first the Englishman's thought was all for the specimen under the glass, but after a moment his hold on the handle tightened, and it was seen to give forth the faintest phosphorescent emanation. Lord Hubert's eyes took on an unseeing stare as the hunchback spoke softly to him.

"The treasure—the treasure—the gold and jewels that shall build your million dollar museum, and put to good uses at last the bottomless chest of the Charings, show it to me," whispered the professor.

A strange, gloating smile crept over the features of the older man. He motioned to Maquarri, and started in a stealthy tread toward the wall at the rear of the study, looking craftily over his shoulder at each step to see that the other followed. Maquarri's eyes glinted. At last—at last—he was on the way to grasping by means of his discovery the first of the world's great fortunes which he meant to have for his own!

Lord Hubert stood close to the wall now; his long fingers padded across the paneling; they caressed the line of the beading that ran around the panel, and counted the rosary from the top. One, two, three, four beads, and his lordship stopped. His unseeing eyes fixed Maquarri as he held a long index finger firmly against the fourth bead.

The hunchback held his breath, inclining his head with the shadow of a nod. Lord Hubert turned again with a gloating smile to the panel, but at that moment there came a knocking at the study door.

Alert on the instant, Maquarri grasped Lord Hubert's hand. The lat-

ter had heard nothing, it was plain, and he let Maquarri lead him back to the study table. In a moment, Lord Hubert was bending over the Yucca moth, the substituted magnifying glass in his hand. He brushed his fingers across his eyes. Those spells of faintness were alarming. He had never been ill until they had begun to assail him recently. Then he became aware that the professor was calling his attention to the fact that someone knocked at the door.

Joan started as she looked past her uncle and saw her stepfather.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," she stammered, "but I thought Uncle Hubert was alone."

She hesitated; then looked up desperately.

"I came, though, to ask a favor of you. I am restless—unhappy. I want something to occupy my mind. If you—if you would let me be your secretary, let me help you with your notes for the new book, Uncle, it might take my mind off myself."

Maquarri started almost imperceptibly as Joan made her request to the unsympathetic Lord Hubert, but in the flash of a second his keen mind had seized on an advantage in the suggestion.

"Why not, Lord Hubert?" he urged. "Your niece is very intelligent. It would speed up the work and get your book to the publishers by the late autumn."

Joan looked gratefully at her stepfather, and he turned away. Lord Hubert spoke bruskly.

"Very well, then, Joan, but mind you, once I take the trouble to show you how the notes are to be handled, I want no shirking. You will have to make up your mind that it will be hard work, and for the best part of each day until the book is finished."

Joan laughed.

"That's exactly what I want, Uncle," she cried. "The harder, the better. When shall we start? Now?

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Or as soon, I mean, as you have finished your talk with the professor?"

"No; wait. I shall want to go on to Charlotte Amalie after I have finished at my banker's in St. John's. There are references to be looked up in the library there. Yes, you shall go with me."

He looked at his watch.

"You have three hours to pack, and we shall be gone a fortnight, probably, so make haste."

He turned to the professor.

"And now, my friend, if you will excuse me, I must be off. Chetworth and I must go over some plans before we leave. When I return, I shall gladly finish our conversation on the Yucca moth."

AS Professor Maquarri rejoined Felix in his study, where the latter still crouched over the wishing machine, he showed himself well pleased.

"It works with him, too, Felix, my boy. I was afraid he might be too old, too set in his ways, to be any good as a hypnotic subject, but the zodium rays are powerful enough to overcome all obstacles."

"But the treasure—did he tell you its hiding place?" cried Felix.

"We were interrupted just at the moment when he started. It is as I suspected. There is a secret panel and a staircase, as I thought, that leads to the spot where the gold is hidden."

Maquarri illustrated for Felix Lord Hubert's stealthy move toward the panel at the rear.

"At that moment a knock came at the door, so I substituted a similar microscope for the one in Lord Hubert's hand, and when after a fleeting attack of the faintness which has recently begun to assail him" (Felix grinned knowingly at the professor) "I called his attention to the knock at the door, it was my daughter Joan."

Felix's start of interest at the girl's name did not escape the professor, but he said nothing.

"How the girl plays into our hands, though! She came herself to offer her services as secretary to the uncle. If we had inspired the thought with the wishing machine, it could not have worked out better for our plans."

Felix's look questioned, and the professor continued.

"After we have the treasure, Lord Hubert must die, as we have said often enough."

"Yes, but the girl?"

"If she is with him as his secretary, it will be easy to make her use the poison ring of the Borgias a second time!"

Maquarri crossed to the window and looked out. His eyes alighted on Joan, standing near the sun dial in the rose garden. He noted a strange, new buoyancy in her manner.

"Hm!" he muttered. "The girl seems not herself recently. Not the self, at any rate, with which we have taken good care to inspire her these past months. I wonder—if she should begin to have a glimmering of the fact that some strange power holds her—if she should start to fight it—she would be no good as a hypnotic subject. At least, not good enough for our purposes."

He mused.

"For murder" (the word, it was plain, afforded him a ghoulish satisfaction), "for murder, my friend, one needs a sure hand and a swift one. 'Yes, it is plain. We must strike soon. As soon as they return from St. John's and Charlotte Amalie. The girl is still under our power if we use her promptly."

His eyes glinted, unmindful of Felix, watching him.

"But if she shows any signs of remembering—of struggling out of the wishing machine's power—it will be simple. We will discharge an extra flow of zodium electrons from the machine, and she shall turn the needle

against herself. Murder and then suicide, eh, my young friend?"

Felix's prehensile fingers grasped his arm.

"Maestro! Maestro!" he cried. "You forget! I love the girl—I desire her! You have promised me that she should be my wife!"

Maquarri brushed him off.

"Your wife to testify against you as accessory to a murder, eh?" he snarled.

Felix quivered, all his desire for Joan unleashed.

"But I must have her," he gasped. "For months I have held back, not daring to oppose your plans, or my own desperate need of money, but it has only been possible because of your promise!"

Maquarri's flat tones broke in on Felix's rage.

"Must it be marriage?" he asked meaningly.

Felix grasped his intent, and made an impatient gesture.

"I must have her! I must have her!" he repeated. "You promised that I should have her!"

"Well, then," said Maquarri, coming to a sudden decision, "you shall have her, but for how long, who shall say? But, mind you, not until after the uncle has been removed and we have carried off the treasure."

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

NOTE.—The first part of this story was printed in the January issue of WEIRD TALES. *Copy will be mailed to any address on receipt of 25 cents.*

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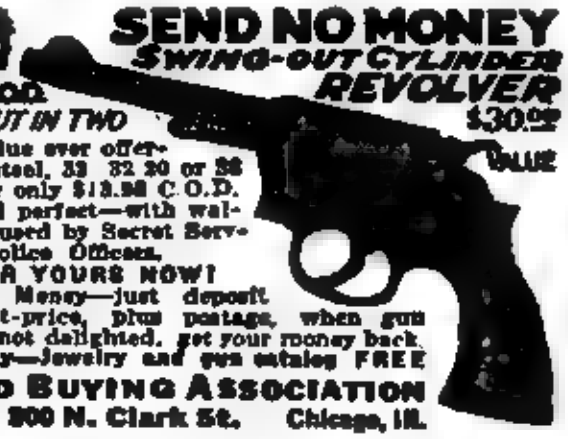

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The Figure of Anubis

By EDWARD PODOLSKY

SOFT beams of mellow light played about the shaded lamp on the long mahogany table. Like exquisitely fashioned swords of gold, they pierced the gray twilight that crept in from the silent street. In a corner of the big room, delicate wreaths of amethyst smoke rose into the air, and two men, comfortably seated in luxuriously upholstered Morris chairs, gazed through this with leisurely contentment.

"You promised to tell me of your strange adventure tonight, Richard."

The man addressed started up from his comfortable position.

"Yes," he answered softly.

The twilight had begun to deepen, and the beams from the shaded lamp appeared more mellow in the deepening gray. Weird and grotesquely lengthened shadows flitted across the somber walls. Wreaths of amethyst smoke still rose in fantastic coils to the ceiling. Richard Held, who had promised to tell the strange tale, was leaning forward. His thin face was stamped with eager excitement. He got rid of his cigar, and for a moment or two he flinched nervously in his chair. Then he composed himself, and in a soft voice, mellowed by the great sorrow he had been through, he began to recount his tale:

"When my sweetheart, dear little Fleurette, died last year, after a brief illness, I was so overcome with grief that my health was disastrously affected. For I was a man of very sensitive temperament and easily susceptible to adverse conditions, and this misfortune pained me keenly. Within two weeks my mental faculties were so affected by the tragedy that a prominent psychiatrist informed my friends that my reason would surely be gone unless something were done to divert me from my grief.

"It is needless to say that I was compelled to retire temporarily from my business and to be confined within my home. There I spent the greater part of the day in my room, where I sat resignedly, the silence deep about me and my soul weighed down with sorrow. Spells of melancholia came upon me. Invariably, after these passed, I would see her face peering out from a darkened corner of the room. And her features were always in an angelic smile, which put a great comfort into my soul. Then there were times when I became too wearied by the great monotony of it all and fell into a peaceful slumber. Then I would hear her sweet voice again and see her lovely face—but they were faint, always faint. And when I began to wonder at their strange faintness, I awoke. Then the sad realization came upon me, and sometimes I

found relief in weeping. I would weep softly to myself.

"In this way three weeks pasesd, each day gray with grief, each night black with sorrow. Then one day my dear friend, Dennis Brenner, came to see me. He drew up a chair and sat down near the fireplace. Slender tongues of flame shot up from the apple limbs, followed by a series of combustive flashes from the sassafras. Then swelled up an ocean of blue light from the hickory logs. In the reflection of this vari-colored play of light I caught a glimpse of Dennis' face, and forthwith I knew that Dennis had a happy thought.

"Dennis turned his face from the fireplace and faced me. 'Listen, Richard,' he said, 'my father has been commissioned by the British Museum to excavate the site of the ancient Egyptian city Ombos, which, it is said contained great gold and silver mines. You know you have often expressed to me the desire for an opportunity to join an archeological expedition. I think your wish has at last been gratified, for I have persuaded my father to ask you to join the expedition. We shall start Saturday; and until that time, I think, you have ample chance to arrange all details for the expedition.'

"When Saturday came we embarked with hearts high in excitement for our prospective life in hunting ancient cities. Within several days after our arrival in Egypt, we were comfortably established in a little village about ten miles to the south of Thebes. The work of excavation was begun immediately,

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and I was recruited into the rank of a supervisor.

"Engrossed deeply in this new and fascinating work, I completely forgot my sorrow. My health returned in considerable measure, and my mentality was sharpened. I had no time to muse over bygone griefs, for my entire day was devoted to excavation work, and my entire night to pleasant and refreshing sleep. Things went on in this fashion for several weeks; I was living life anew, and I was content and happy.

"ONE DAY the heat had been particularly fierce, and I was indisposed to join the ranks of the excavators. Moreover, I was seized with a slight fever which confined me to my bed. And that day, as I lay abed in the silence of the little room, old thoughts and memories began to come back. Oh, how hard I tried to drive those maddening visions from my brain! But to what futile avail!

"That night my old sadness returned to me. Fain would I sleep, but my depression weighed too heavily upon me. Again that strange daze of old, born of great sorrow, entered my brain. I became restless. I yearned to be about, to walk and breathe in the cool air of the blissful night. I jumped out of bed, donned a light white suit, and went into the silent night.

"From out of the silvery billows of the Nile, in the purple distance, the moon was slowly rising. A heavy and impressive silence lay over the land. Toward the north reposed Thebes—Thebes, which contained the ruins of an ancient civilization. The night was cool and its beauty great, and within me was the desire to walk, to flee from my sorrow into the somber mystery of the night-hued north. So I turned my steps toward Thebes.

"I do not know how long I walked, for I was lost in a deep revery during the entire journey. However, it seemed to have consumed but little time, for soon I came in sight of the city. On the horizon I saw the grand ruins of Thebes loom up into the slowly changing sky.

"When I arrived at Thebes the last streak of darkness had gone, and the skies became aflame with the fierce color of the early dawn. The air was calm, and the ruins of the ancient city rose with a strange melancholy into the fiery light. Nowhere was a living thing visible, and I was alone in the archaic city, which was as silent as the sheeted dead.

"The long walk to Thebes had in a measure dispelled my feeling of depression, and having returned, in a degree, to my normal state, I was seized with a desire to explore the silent ruins. So in the fiery light of the early morning I began to walk among the grand ruins of Thebes.

"I had been walking about for quite a while, absorbed in the romance of an ancient world, when my feet caught against a mutilated statue of Anubis lying prostrate on several fragments of a marble column. The next instant I had fallen to the ground. When I rose and looked about me confusedly, I observed an enormous, lidless sarcophagus lying several feet away from where I stood. My heart beat with excitement at this sight, for I felt that I had discovered something of great value. Now I was in a position to repay Dr. Brenner for his great kindness. The sarcophagus was built of dull yellow basalt, and it contained a mummy that had in no way suffered disturbance.

"I dragged my find into a darkened corner of the ruins and repaired hastily to Dr. Brenner to inform him of my good fortune. He assigned

two men to me, and late in the afternoon we had the mummy safely at our quarters. Because of the lack of appropriate space at that time, Dr. Brenner requested that I have the mummy in my cabin. The day's work was done, and each man returned to his quarters. I retired to my cabin and read till midnight. Several times I glanced up from my reading and looked at the mummy. It was indeed a great prize, and I congratulated myself on my find.

"THAT night I went to bed, tired from the long day's walking, and sorely craving rest and sleep. But sleep came not so easily, and instead returned again old memories, and pangs, and sorrows. The mummy, in its sarcophagus, was tilted up against the wall; and I envied it, separated as it was from the world of sorrow in its encasement of bandages. A full-orbed moon was high above the Nile, and the light flooded into my room, making everything strangely clear and ouphish. The mummy particularly seemed bizarre in that flood of silvery beams. I regarded it in fascination.

"For several minutes I had been looking at the strangely pleasant sight when I became startled by a peculiar whiteness that had gradually settled on the mummy's face. Dr. Brenner had ascertained that the mummy was that of a young woman, probably a princess from the time of the Pharaohs. It was swathed in bandages, some of which had worn away in parts or had become loose. Imitation eyes, brows, and lips were weirdly painted on the wrappings, probably an effort to simulate the terrible features of a protecting guardian to ward off the evil spirits during the body's voyage to the other world. The figure, plainly discernible within its casing, was beau-

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tiful and lithe. The thumbs were slender, and the fingers, each of which was separately bandaged, were long and tapering. The neck was full, and the chin displayed that firmness which is seen only in very beautiful women. While I was raptly admiring the beauty of the long departed princess, the glow on the face grew whiter, and the imitation lips, brows, and eyes on the wrappings grew weirder in the phosphorescent glare.

"Gradually I became aware of an eery stillness. Intermixed with this was something strangely indescribable, something that reminded me of the atmosphere of the catacombs of the primitive Christians. Fascinated, I continued to gaze at the mummy, when suddenly from out of the deathlike stillness came a sob—low, weird, gentle. There was something uncanny and yet familiar in that sob. Several minutes dragged by, and again I heard it—low, weird, gentle.

"Was the mummy alive? I strained my vision to detect any movements in its limbs. I lay down, strangely wearied by this uncanny experience, and I turned my face to the opposite wall. But some strange impulse caused me to look back. My soul became convulsed with fear, and every fiber in me trembled. The mummy lived! Its bosom began to rise and fall!

"My terror was now supreme. I wanted to shriek, to scream, to cry out; but the sounds froze in my throat. Then out of the awful silence came that sigh—soft and low. A tremor ran through the mummy from head to foot. Then one of its hands moved, and the fingers clutched the air convulsively, as if the pain from awaking from a sleep of twenty-five centuries was great and unbearable. Quickly the bandages from the fingers began to fall away. Still held in great terror, I lay and watched. Finally the fingers were free from their wrappings, and in the phosphorescent glare I beheld them. They were long and slender, but there was something about them that struck me as strangely familiar. They possessed an individuality that I had known somewhere before.

"Gradually the hands moved upward, and reaching the throat, the fingers set to work slowly and painfully to remove the bandages. Soon I beheld a glimmer of skin as pale as beautiful marble. The nose was then unveiled; then the upper lip, exquisitely and delicately cut; then the teeth. And among them I saw a gold tooth—a gleaming gold tooth, newly fashioned, it seemed, by the hands of a modern dentist! The uncasing continued. The chin became exposed to view; then the upper part of the head—hair, long and black and luxuriant—the forehead low and white—the brows raven black. And the eyes! It was Fleurette!

"I sprang from my bed with a madness that knew no bounds. Slowly she was advancing toward me. I flung out my arms to embrace her, the woman I loved best in the world. But something black and hideous loomed up suddenly before me, and I fell to the floor.

"For several minutes I lay stunned and bruised by the sudden fall. Then I looked up, and there, bending over and peering into my eyes, was the fleshless, moldering face of a foul and barely recognizable corpse!"

"With a shriek of terror I rolled back. I glanced at the mummy. It was lying on the floor, stiff and still, every bandage in its place; while standing over it was the figure of Anubis, lurid and menacing in the fiery gleams of the early dawn."

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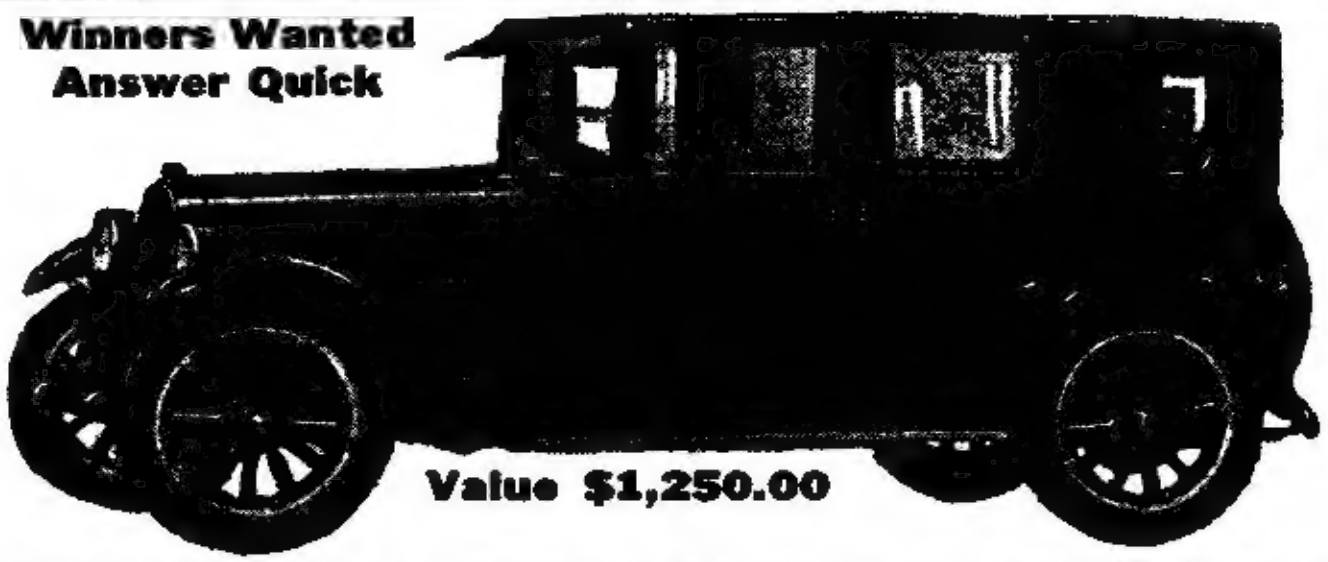

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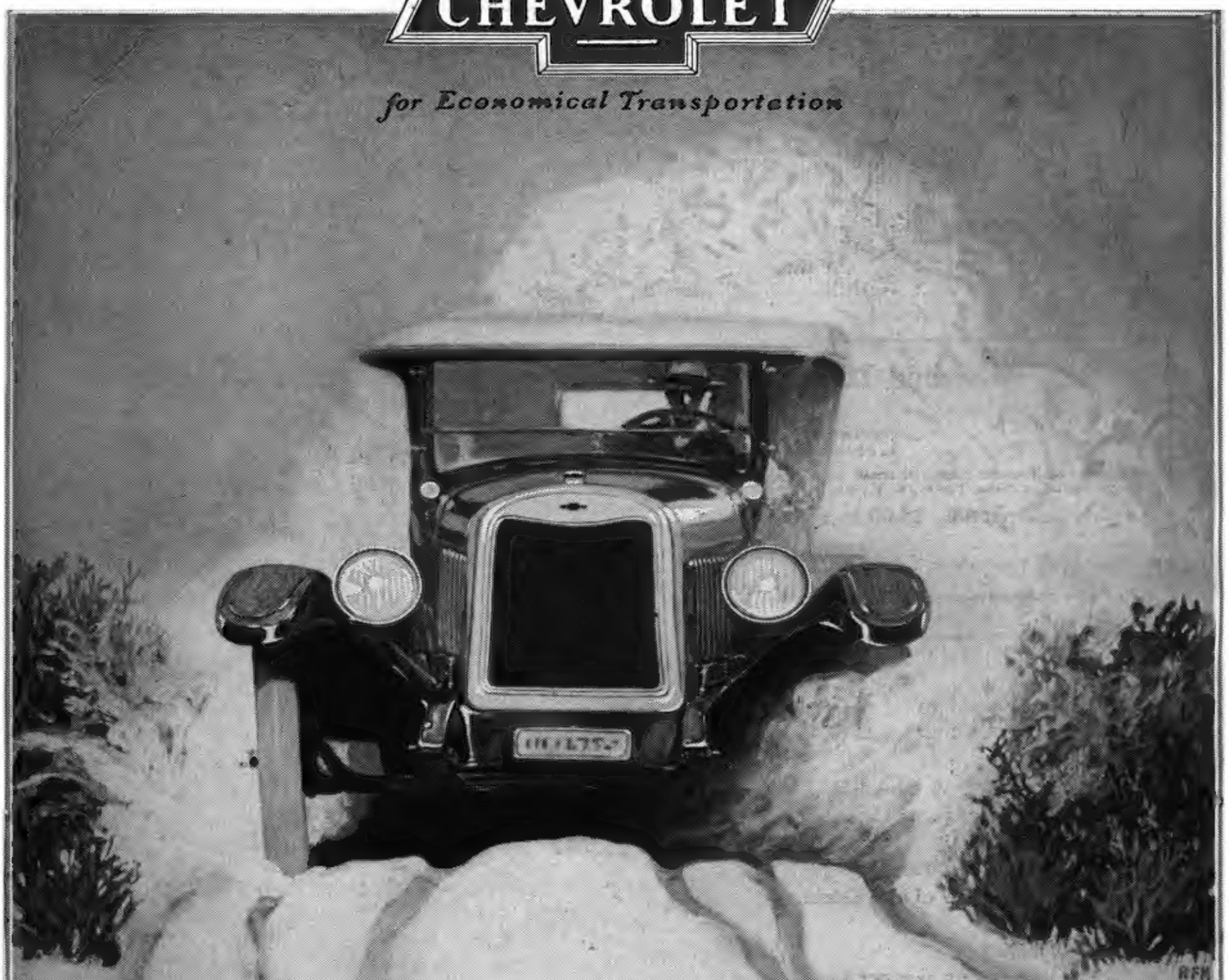

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